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MARY GLENN

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By

SARAH GERTRUDE MILLIN

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MARY GLENN

CHAPTER I

I

EMMA VAN AARDT and her husband Brand were having tea on the stoep when they saw a Kaffir ride up on horseback, dismount in front of their house, and fasten his reins to the blue-gum that was half as old as the town of Lebanon itself.

Yet that was not very old. For this Lebanon was a village in the Transvaal. Just about sixty years ago Brand's grandfather had looked about him here, had seen running water, black soil, eager growth, sheltering mountains, and had said to himself: "Here I will settle." And, as there was nothing to hinder him, he had brought his family by ox-wagon, had attracted first one and then another of his large clan, had built a church. He had found a name for his village in the Old Testament—as other South Africans

too had done when they called their settlements Bethel, Bethlehem, or Bethesda; Hebron, Elim, or Pniel—and near the word in the Song of Songs he had discovered also a right description for his encompassing mountains: the Luipaardsbergen he had called them because leopards lived there—the Mountains of the Leopards.

2

In these days leopards no longer lived on the Luipaardsbergen. Now Lebanon was civilized. It had not grown at the pace of mining towns, but it had a town hall and a bank and a post-office and a club and electric light and a bioscope and three garages. Now it danced syncopated dances, and had its social sets. Now the great sprawling lands of the original settlers had been parcelled out among their descendants, and people farmed more tightly and carefully than they once had done. Now there were as many English as Dutch in Lebanon, and people like the van Aardts spoke English. Now Brand van Aardt had become a person of consequence in the district. Now it was the middle of the year 1924.

3

"That is Mary Glenn's Kaffir," said Brand as the man approached them wearing the offal clothing which is the native's share of white civilization.

"Yes, Piet?" he called.

The Kaffir mounted the four steps and handed him a note.

"Dear Brand," it said, "Come at once."

Brand passed the slip of paper to his wife. Mary's curtness was frightening.

"I'll bring out the car," he said. "Will you come too, Emma?"

"Yes. I'll get our coats and hats while you fetch the car."

Poor Mary! Strange to think that she had once envied Mary and been jealous of her.

"Mary is expecting her baby in two or three weeks," she told her husband as she seated herself beside him in the car for the thirty mile drive to Glenn's farm. "But it can't be that she is ill, or she would have sent for her mother or me, and not for you."

4

As Emma sat in the car there came into her mind an old photograph that hung in their hall. Her eyes had rested on it without conscious vision as she passed it a few minutes ago, but now every detail of it seemed unexpectedly to be alive before her.

Brand was in that group, and Mary, and she herself. In those days—thirteen years ago—they had all of them been somewhere in the very early twenties and unmarried, and everyone knew that Brand was in love with Mary. Now she, Emma, was Brand's wife, and Mary had married Elliott Glenn; Emma was the lucky one, and Mary the unlucky one.

The people on old photographs always seemed to Emma to look so innocent and helpless: there was something so pathetically unaware about them. They stared into the world with unseeing eyes, and their very being was a blotting out of light.

5

Emma remembered how surprised all the people in Lebanon were when Mary Adams returned one year from a holiday at the coast near Cape Town and announced that she was engaged to a Mr. Elliott Glenn. Mr. Glenn, she said, was connected with an English family who lived in Something-or-other House in an English county. He himself wanted to buy land in South Africa to farm. They would be married in six months' time, and go for their honeymoon to England.

She showed her overwhelmed acquaintances Mr. Glenn's photograph. He did not look as impressive as they had imagined he would from Mary's talk; but still, he seemed to be what people in Lebanon considered a typical Englishman, and that was something which they admired very much.

Mary was so happy, so exuberant—if one sympathized with all the circumstances of her life one might even forgive her for being so proud and condescending as well.

CHAPTER II

I

MARY ADAMS had not always had the chance to be proud and condescending. Her father (she was an only child) was the market master of Lebanon; and her mother had, before her marriage and before she came to Lebanon, worked in a grocer's shop. One heard even that she had been a waitress. But this was not true. It was simply that there was something about Mrs. Adams which gave one these ideas about her. One never got them from Mary herself.

Since childhood she had had a quite highbred little face; a way of holding up her dark head and looking from under her eyelids; a manner of speaking; a habit of thought; a particular outlook.

She *was*, except in two vital respects, a little aristocrat: she had not been born an aristocrat —and she knew it.

It was not a question of lineage: people might, without any hereditary justification, feel themselves to be as good as the best, might have such calm confidence in their own personalities that they positively could not recognize superiority. But Mary had never had that inward assurance. She could not feel herself to be what she tried to seem.

As a child she could not, for instance, be friendly with the magistrate's little girl without thinking elatedly that she was being friendly with the magistrate's little girl. Although, with one part of her, she despised Louise Delaporte because she was slow and stupid, with another part of her she could never, for a moment, forget that Louise's father was the magistrate, and her own father the market master. She would adopt a manner of leadership towards Louise, she would be the initiator in all their plans and conversations; but she would remember, past it all, that Louise's mother had silver teaspoons, and had learnt somewhere to say gyel instead of girl, while her own mother drank tea out of a saucer, and made mistakes in spelling.

It was not that Mary did not love her mother. She did love her. She helped her in the house, and saved up her pocket-money to give her presents, and treated her with conscientious respect. She sat beside her with graceful haughtiness at any little public affairs that occurred in Lebanon, noticing how Mrs. Delaporte and the bank manager's wife and their children sat together merrily in a group, and feeling that she and her mother were shamed and isolated there in the cheap seats; and when other girls spoke about their mothers, Mary spoke about her mother as if she, too, were an important mother.

Mrs. Adams believed that Mary was the best daughter in the world, and conformed to her own very proper ideas about how parents should be honoured. She considered in the traditional manner that the accidental bearing of a child was a moral attribute, and assumed that she was ennobled in Mary's eyes because she had conceived her.

Yet if there was one thing Mary could not bear about her mother it was just this fact. She loved her, not for pre-natal, but for post-natal,

reasons. Not because she had brought her into the world—she resented her, indeed, as the vehicle of her being—but because she had, with all her flesh and soul, maintained her there: because she exulted in her joys and grieved over her sorrows and soothed her pains and encouraged her hopes; because she knew that but one passion burnt in her mother's heart, and that was this ceaseless, terrible love for her child. Mary loved her mother, not because she wanted to, but because she could not help it.

She would certainly have been better pleased if she had had Mrs. Delaporte for a mother; she would have preferred to march through the world beside her mother in filial pride; she would have liked to be able to appreciate her for public as well as for private reasons; to be able to exhibit her as if she were an embellishment and not a flaw. Yet these very facts gave her love a conscious tang it would not have had if some bitterness had not been mixed with it. She could not take her mother for granted; she was compelled to think about her.

2

She loved her father too, but with even less satisfaction. Her mother had no manners, but she had principles and a certain largeness of courage and temper. She could be gloriously defiant and gloriously angry, and it was at such times that she won, not only Mary's love, but also her respect. But Mr. Adams was a tall, thin, grubby man with a bald head and generally unshaven cheeks, who hid his essential timorousness behind a big voice and a noisy humour. Mary had considered him very clever when she was quite small, but now she loved him only when she found him pathetic, or had some small immediate cause for gratitude. He thought himself gifted and clever, poor man, and, in truth, he was so hollow inside that his very voice and laugh seemed to have a cavernous sound—as if they were reverberating with his emptiness.

And he stood on a table in the small market hall, selling vegetables in heaps, and boxes of fruit; shouting his wares; making jokes at the expense of the Indian hawkers who were the

principal buyers; showing off to his negligible, yet contemptuous, audience.

At home he would mention that tomatoes were up threepence a box, or that he could not get rid of his oranges, or that he had managed to sell some peaches that looked well enough outside, but were quite brown and wormy round the stone.

"You shouldn't do that, Tom," Mrs. Adams would say.

"I shouldn't, eh? I should cut open every peach and see if it's all right before I sell it? You women know a lot about business."

It never entered his head, as he spoke, that he knew nothing about business either, that he could barely maintain even this little home in any comfort. He was perfectly, swaggeringly, satisfied with himself.

But Mary could not bear the mean talk of a penny this way or that; the triumphs over dirty Indians; the meagre satisfactions.

She had an entirely different standard.

3

She admitted to herself, as she grew older, that she liked to associate with people of standing. But she refused to consider this as snobbery. It was only, she told herself, that she could not bear it that anyone in the world should think of her as less than an equal. She wanted it to be generally recognized that there was no door through which she could not enter if she chose.

Why she thought this ought to be so she could not have explained. She only felt that what she desired the world owed her.

As she grew towards womanhood she seriously considered her position. Should she prove her pride by sitting superbly at home and waiting until *she* was sought out, or should she leave her base and fight her way up?

That would be noble and dignified, she thought, to force the world to come to her. But the question was: would it? She knew well enough that it would not. The girls who had been friendly with her at school were still friendly, but they smiled at her from behind a

wall of glass. They could see her, they could hear her, but they were divided from her. Oh, she prayed, if only she could become more important than they, how she would show them, how she would snub the people who now put on airs with her—but how she would surround herself with those whom everybody else excluded.

As it was, she made a practice of being friendly with her obvious inferiors. She did not visit them, or have them to visit her, but she was always especially charming to them, very kind, very solicitous. The people she could not bear were those who thought themselves (quite unjustifiably, of course) her own equals.

She was never at her ease, never quite natural, because she was always readjusting herself to varying social circumstances.

4

It was not a question, she decided, of what one's parents were, or one's income, or one's position. It was a question of what one was oneself, of how, as an individual, one looked and spoke and behaved and acted. Why could not the better inhabitants of Lebanon think of

her simply as Mary Adams, a person in her own right? Why had they to think of her as the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Adams? What harm would it have done them to invite her to their homes, and let her have a little of the fun to which her youth entitled her?

It was open to her, certainly, to have other friends and share in other amusements. But to such an acceptance of failure she would not resign herself. It was not only that Louise and her associates had the jolliest time—dances and picnics and private theatricals; it was not only that if there was anything doing in Lebanon, from a bazaar to a reading circle, it was they who did it; it was not only that if anybody notable came to Lebanon they snapped him up, that, in general, all the pleasantness of life congregated around them, and that in the rest of Lebanon there was no one worth troubling about—it was also, and chiefly, that she refused to admit, or to have it admitted, that she had not the privilege of meeting anyone she chose on equal terms.

5

If only, she thought, she had had some definite talent like singing or playing tennis, it would all have been different. Then Lebanon could not have done without her. It would have had to have her at its musical evenings or in its inter-town tennis tournaments. It would have *needed* her.

But her own qualifications were simply personal. She had nothing to give, and that was what counted. She had to force her way by care and determination, by taking advantage of her opportunities.

Once, for instance, she met, while travelling round the coast (none of Mary's chances occurred in Lebanon, and, to their utmost, her parents assisted her to find them outside), a professional violinist. The man fell in love with her, and followed her home. For the good reason that he was already married, he did not offer to marry her, but while he stayed in Lebanon as her friend, she feverishly pushed her social chances.

Everybody in Lebanon wanted to meet him,

and she, Mary, was the medium of intercourse. In her little home he played to Louise and the other school-friends who, until now, had merely smiled at Mary from behind their glass wall; and "Won't you bring him to see us?" they asked, and "Couldn't we get up a concert while he's here?" they suggested, and "Let us show him around Lebanon," they offered.

That helped Mary a step up, and although, after her violinist left Lebanon, she was again rather neglected, it could never now be altogether forgotten that she had entertained, and been entertained, by the right people.

The right people. How she despised them! How she hated them!

6

Mrs. Adams was indignant and furious about the way Lebanon ignored her beautiful and gifted daughter; and when, following a dance to which Mary had not been invited, she met Mrs. Delaporte in the Main Street, she looked past her with a set red face. "Why do you want to have anything to do with those people?"

she demanded of Mary. "They're not fit to be your servants."

"That may be," said Mary with pale cheeks and a tight heart, "but you are the only person in Lebanon who knows it."

She had greeted Mrs. Delaporte with a determined, unconcerned little smile, but she expended her bitterness vicariously on her mother.

"They all know it," said Mrs. Adams firmly, "and they're jealous. That's what it is. They're jealous. And I wouldn't mind telling them so either. I wouldn't mind telling Mrs. Delaporte this minute what I think of her and her precious daughter Louise."

She turned round to look after Mrs. Delaporte. Her face grew redder. "And I will tell her," she said, "I will."

She made a rapid movement forward.

Mary caught her arm. "Mother. For Heaven's sake, mother. You'll only make fools of both of us."

Mrs. Adams shook her off.

"I can't stand it any more," she said, forswearing her pride, and ranging herself with her

daughter. "I can't stand their spite against you."

"They're not compelled to have me," said Mary, voicing a truth against which her instinct rebelled.

"*I'll* compel them," cried Mrs. Adams.

Mary tightened her grip on her mother's arm.

"If you say one word to Mrs. Delaporte," she said in a voice that was low and hard with passion, "I'll go away from Lebanon. You hear that, mother? I'll go away."

Mrs. Adams faltered. Mary released her.

"I'll make them recognize me yet," she vowed.

CHAPTER III

I

MARY often wondered what the people in Lebanon would do if she married Brand van Aardt. It was true he lived on his farm outside the town, and never troubled himself about the social side of things, but then he *was* Brand van Aardt. His grandfather had founded Lebanon, and the van Aardt clan had always been well thought of in the district in spite of the fact that it was, in these days, beginning to lose its patriarchal spaciousness.

That was, first, because the old man's possessions had been so divided and subdivided among his descendants that there was, by this time, little left for each; and, second, because the van Aardts had so strangely simple an attitude towards life. They made no demands, matrimonial or otherwise, and had absorbed such a number of undistinguished connections that it was doubtful if the original van Aardt

tradition would outlast another generation. They still, all the van Aardts, stood under the shelter of their name in quiet confidence, but, as any outsider could see, change was encroaching on their foothold.

Even then Brand, as a personable young bachelor, might have had the whole of Lebanon open to him. Only he did not want it. He had dropped out of things. He was rooted to his piece of land. He seemed to care for nothing else.

Except, of course, for Mary Adams. Since childhood he had loved Mary Adams. It was a love she did not return. She liked him, she had an actual affection for him, but he was sunk in her estimation just because he had loved her all his life—he was merely an immature rustic, she felt, and he lacked that urgency of spirit which alone, under the circumstances, could have awakened a real response from her. He appeared to have no ambition, to make no demands.

The very proof of it lay in the fact that, in all Lebanon, he had chosen to love her. Although one side of Mary maintained fiercely that she

was as good as anyone else—better; another side despised anyone who did not despise her. Whoever met her on a level footing was, in her own eyes, lowered by the association.

Nevertheless, she quite often considered the question of marrying Brand—she had a feeling that it might be dangerous not to marry Brand, and then she wanted to get away from home. Yet how far an escape would that be? She would live on the farm, and Brand would expect her to be a good farmer's wife, and the people in Lebanon would lose their interest in him when once he was married to her, and her father and mother would come and spend Sundays with them. She would quite have liked her father and mother to spend Sundays with them. But what sort of a triumph over Lebanon did the whole picture convey?

No. What she wanted was to spurn Lebanon from under her feet. What she wanted was to come back to a grovelling Lebanon only for the pleasure of kicking it away in light contempt.

2

And when she returned from that holiday in Cape Town and announced her engagement to Elliott Glenn she felt her triumph close at hand. "The Lebanon Herald" had a paragraph about her in its News of the Day column, mentioning Mr. Glenn's relations, and their house and their county. And Louise Delaporte came to see Mary, and Mary casually introduced important-sounding names into her talk, and said:

"We shall be married in Cape Town and go straight to England. Elliott wants me to meet his people. I've just had such a beautiful letter from his mother. I suppose the poor dear is quite alarmed at his marrying a South African. Heaven knows what she must think we are out here. And, of course, she has never even heard of Lebanon."

She said that last deliberately. Let Louise realize that people in the big world did not know of the mere existence of this place where she thought herself so important.

"And then will you come back to South Africa?" Louise asked very respectfully.

"I don't know. Elliott rather likes the country."

Mary said this as if it were an amiable whim of Elliott's to like South Africa, a little weakness that she would humour for a while.

"And in what part does Mr. Glenn think of settling?" pursued Louise.

"Oh, he hasn't decided. Not near Lebanon, I hope. Lebanon is so backward, isn't it? It would be rather dreadful to have to spend one's whole existence here. It's not that one minds living the simple life. But Lebanon doesn't offer even that. It's neither one thing nor another. It isn't country and it isn't town. I'd rather be frankly uncivilized than have to ape civilization. Don't you think so too?"

She overawed Louise now with her trite superiority as she had done in their school-days. Louise felt that, indeed, Lebanon was a stupid and pretentious little village. And she answered Mary without guile.

"Yes, it isn't much of a place. I do envy you, Mary, going to Europe, and all that."

Mary's soul was laved in honey.

Mrs. Adams came in and sat beside her, all

her contented heart in her honest eyes. She was about to lose the treasure, the very justification, of her life, but how easily she could bear it as long as Mary was so happy, so happy, she moved to the very rhythm of joy.

Mary patted her mother's large, coarse hand with the blunt finger-tips, and the roughly cut nails. And, as Louise left the house, she pulled her mother out with her, and they both accompanied Louise to the gate with their arms across one another's shoulders.

But, at night, thinking over her talk with Louise, Mary hated herself. She shouldn't have boasted like that. It was not what a lady ought to do. Even Louise, for all her stupidity, must have thought her vulgar.

She tried to forget it, and took out Elliott's last letter and his photograph. Ah, Elliott, he was rescuing her from her imprisonment as knights of old used to rescue their maidens. Her eyes absorbed his face with its pleasant, rather empty look. With deep respect, in an utter abandonment of gratitude, she loved it.

3

Yet she was sorry for Brand when he came to congratulate her, and, for the first time, because there was the heightened imagination of finality in her vision, she saw him as desirable.

He was very attractive, with his steady, deep-set eyes of greenish-blue, and his ruddy colouring—not distinguished, of course, like Elliott, but still, undeniably good looking.

And then there was something so safe and permanent about him—for a second she had a distinct feeling of pain at having irrevocably to give him up.

He was no fool either, and went his way steadily. Perhaps he would even get on in the world. Yes, although she had always maintained that he lacked ambition, she had a sudden prophetic notion that he would get on in the world. Just because she was losing him, that was what would happen.

A curious, desperate, ridiculous wish possessed her that she might keep Brand as well as Elliott. Her voice shook as she spoke to him.

But his was quite calm—very calm. He ex-

amined Mr. Glenn's photograph with interest, and listened attentively while she babbled about travelling on the continent.

"Soon it will be as if I had never lived in Lebanon," she said.

"Will it?" said Brand.

"I mean, everyone will have forgotten me."

"You mustn't think that," Brand expostulated politely.

"Won't *you* have forgotten me, Brand?"

He smiled. "Of course not."

Something overcame her. She could hardly see Brand for the moment.

"I'll never forget you," she said.

He did not answer.

"I mean it, Brand," she persisted, hardly hearing her own words.

He smiled again. She tried to see behind his tight expression.

"Why, certainly, you mean it," he agreed.

She wanted him to say something, to say something—something different.

She realized subconsciously that she was leaning towards him as towards an embrace.

She had never felt for Brand what she felt this moment. But he sat there immovably.

She recovered herself, and laughed a little quick emotional laugh.

"I'm getting quite touched at the idea of going away," she said.

But, actually, after Brand had left the house, she wept.

CHAPTER IV

I

It was while Mary was in Europe on her honeymoon that Brand married Emma Page.

Who, to look at Emma, at the little sober figure she cut in the world, would have known of the romantic spirit that drove her inward life.

She had come to Lebanon two years ago as a teacher, and she disliked her work. It was a mixed school at which she taught, and she had boys in her class as old as she was, and half a foot taller, but she barely felt they belonged to her own generation. All around Lebanon there were farms: citrus farms, mealie farms, cattle farms; and these big boys were the sons of farmers, and had not, as children, had the opportunity to go to school. Some of them were possessed of the solemn, studious industry which relates the South African Dutch to the Scotch, but others were uncouth louts, who,

unable, with their slackened brains, to concentrate on work, tried to pass the tedious hours by making their grave-eyed teacher a source of amusement.

They did not succeed. She could hold them. Yet, towards the end of the term, she was pale and exhausted-looking, and she could barely, each day, wait, in self-control, for the school door to close behind her.

It was at such a time that Brand van Aardt came upon her at the Kloof.

The Kloof was a cleft in the mountains that surrounded Lebanon, and at the foot of which lay his farm. This day the Lebanon school was having its annual picnic among his trees. Through the cleft, from between great flanks of rock, there leapt from fern-covered ledge to fern-covered ledge a narrow fall of water that looked like the white tail of a horse. In hollows on the ledges the water lay in pools almost as clear as the clear air itself, so that the round pebbles at the bottom seemed to be yellowing leaves floating on the top. And, down the sides of the cleft, trees, their roots exposed by the water, leaned about in indolent attitudes.

Beside the lowest pool Emma was sitting and crying. She did not look as romantic as the scenery and occasion warranted, and she despised her tears. Now, as Brand approached, she dried her eyes, and quickly rose. She was ashamed and nervous, but her voice was clear. "I suppose you were going to climb up the Kloof. Don't trouble about me. There is nothing wrong. I hate this teaching, that is all, and I am having an attack of nerves."

And, before he had time to answer, she walked away.

Nevertheless, he could not afterwards meet her without some interest. He noticed then that she had steady grey eyes. And although, at first, she avoided him, feeling that, having seen her unguarded, he had her at a disadvantage, she knew that she had now some meaning for him. She knew it as certainly as she knew that, to the rest of Lebanon, she was only a respected pedagogic symbol. . . .

2

Brand spoke to Mary about Emma. "Why don't you see more of her?" he asked.

"Of Emma?" said Mary. "I have never thought of it. Isn't she rather dull?"

"What makes you say that?"

"I suppose her dowdiness. But I don't really know. One doesn't seem to meet her anywhere."

Brand looked at Mary, at her pretty little dark face, with suffering. How could he love her as he did? One doesn't seem to meet her! Why had Mary to pretend with him?

"She goes to tennis at the Delaportes," he said. "You couldn't expect an intelligent girl to want to do anything but play games with thick-heads like Louise Delaporte and her friends."

"Does she?" asked Mary quickly. "Does she play tennis at the Residency?"

"I believe so."

He could see Mary readjusting her conception of Emma; and he understood as well as if she had told him that she was, at the same time, jealously wondering what the Delaportes found in Emma that they did not find in her.

"Is she a good player?" she enquired casually. She was thinking rapidly that, if she asked Emma to play with her, Emma would

invite her to a return game, perhaps doubles, with some of the Delaporte crowd.

Mary knew as well as anyone in Lebanon that Mr. Delaporte, on his magistrate's salary, was so poor that his brother was paying for his son's university education; she realized even better than most that Mrs. Delaporte was so stupid one could not have an intelligent conversation with her; but, for all that, they were at the head of Lebanon, and they personified her ambition. . . .

Brand had given up trying to follow her twisted calculations. He answered her question shortly. "Why not play with her, and see?"

3

And, actually, a friendship had sprung up between the two girls. If one ignored her social obsessions Mary could be very lovable. Had she been born in that state or rank which her soul instinctively demanded, she would, no doubt, have been a gracious and dignified woman—a little arrogant, perhaps, but then no one would have deprecated an appropriate arrogance.

Now, however, she had to fight for what she felt should have been hers; and the struggle left her spiritually dishevelled—it absorbed her strength, marred her gifts, depleted her resources, and shamed her by defeat. She was like a country which cannot build itself up from within because its treasure and blood are abandoned to war.

Emma pitied her. After all, it was not only ludicrous, it was also pathetic, that the girls she had known since babyhood, with whom she had shared the equality of school life, should now consider that they held a better place in the world than she, and reject her. The fact that Lebanon was in itself so unimportant, its inhabitants so undistinguished, its social rewards so contemptible, made no difference. That the doctor's or the bank-manager's wives did not receive Mrs. Adams and Mary in Lebanon was a misfortune as biting as if a queen had denied her court to a courtier. The very negligibility of Lebanon made the position only the more distressing. Mary was still further humbled by being placed below the littleness of Lebanon.

Emma found herself liking Mary. It was

not only that Mary was pretty and graceful, she was also capable, and very often generous. When Mrs. Adams assured Emma that Mary was the best child any woman ever had, she could appreciate the mother's enthusiasm. Mary was a considerate daughter to these two old people who could give her so little besides their love. She was a warm and frank companion, and when she knew Emma better, she offered up on their friendship her chief talent. "Let me make your clothes," she said. "You're a dear, Emma, but you don't know how to dress."

There was a steady incorruptibility in Emma that Mary had come to love, and, although it was possible that she might not have been so satisfied with their association if Emma had not had her little formal position in Lebanon, still, the offer was not now made with any hope of return. The friendship had been meanly conceived, yet, having been born, it lived and grew.

But when Mary spoke about Brand, Emma could not answer her. And when, in the end, Mary said good-bye to Brand and Emma on Lebanon station as she was leaving to marry

Elliott Glenn in Cape Town—as they stood together waving to her, Mary was suddenly flooded with a jealous foreboding.

On the way to Cape Town she was thinking so much of Brand and Emma that she could hardly think of Elliott and herself.

CHAPTER V

I

EVERYONE in Lebanon knew that Brand was marrying Emma because Mary was lost to him, and Emma had no doubt of it herself. But she loved Brand, she wanted him, and there was the end of it.

And yet their marriage was not so poor an affair as it seemed. It was based, at least, on understanding and sincerity.

Out of his love for Mary Brand had never had any happiness. It had been a kind of resentful, angry emotion, and, often, even while he loved her, he had hated and despised her too. There had been periods of weeks and months when he had not gone near her, when he had felt the weary relief of escape.

And then, by accident, or by intention on her part, they had met again; and again something in the way she held her head, a tone in her

voice, an allurement in her words, had recalled the painful attraction she had for him.

He had tried to explain this to Emma when he asked her to marry him.

"I want to tell you everything," he had said, and had ended his confession: "Would you call such a thing love?"

Emma's heart had shed tears. Would she call this thing love, this very feeling she had for Brand, this feeling she herself could not inspire in him!

"Yes," she admitted honestly. "Yes, I would."

What could he say now? He felt all at once that if Emma did not come to him and appease his desolation, he would not know how to go on with life. He felt a desperate need of her. He looked at her with a wordless beseeching.

She drew his head to her breast, and smoothed his dark hair back with trembling, restrained fingers.

"Poor Brand," she said.

2

Now, as she sat beside her husband in the car on their way to Mary, Emma could not help thinking how Mary, having wantonly given Brand up, to-day, in her need, turned to him. What that need might be she could not imagine, but she was, not less than Brand, prepared to do whatever could be done for Mary. It was many years now since her affection for Brand's first love had been coloured by any other emotion than that of pity.

But she remembered how, at one time, both fear and jealousy had lain in her thoughts of Mary, how she had suffered because she was not as pretty, not as graceful, even not as well-dressed, as Mary. Her dowdiness was, indeed, when she compared herself with Mary, a real trouble to her.

At the changing of the seasons she used to lie awake at night thinking, with a kind of despair, that now she had to go and buy new clothes, that it was her duty to Brand to go and buy new clothes.

It was not that she could not afford to do so—Brand had begun to prosper in the days following his marriage—it was only that, with all her heart, she hated the business.

When Brand went to Johannesburg she would accompany him, and he would encourage her to go shopping.

She saw herself entering a shop, not certain what she wanted, a woman from a small town, a woman who had never been physically attractive, and asking a callous young princess to show her the new season's dresses. The young princess would enquire if it was an evening dress madam wanted to see, or an afternoon dress, or a costume, or——

She would say hurriedly: "Show me an evening dress. Nothing too fashionable. I don't want anything too fashionable."

Why did she say that so fiercely? Why dared she not be fashionable? There were women older, plainer, worse situated than she, and they had the courage to consider themselves worth attiring.

They would stand before a mirror—she had

watched them herself—and they would complacently say: "This suits me." . . . And the fact was that nothing could suit them. They could look a little better or a little worse—that was all.

Nevertheless, it was something even to look a little better. And it was still more to look as if one had confidence in oneself.

She knew that. She knew how much she lost by her air of self-depreciation. Even the shop-girls understood her psychology and took advantage of it. They would urge her to buy things that they would never have ventured to show a woman whose standard of dress they respected.

With loathing she would try on the dresses: afraid that one might be too daring, afraid that another might be too advanced for Lebanon, afraid that Brand would think a third too uninteresting, afraid that this one was too old, and that one too young.

She would ask helplessly: "Is this what is being worn now?"

Inevitably she would be assured that it was.

"Do you think," she would continue in a rage of self-contempt, "it suits me?"

She knew that only one answer would be forthcoming. She would glance round at the assistant, trying to read from her face the truth she could not find in her words. She would take the dress off and say: "May I try that other again?"

In the end she would buy one out of sheer weariness, and, no sooner would it be delivered, than she would feel that she would rather lose money on it than have to keep it, that this dress, of all dresses, was precisely the wrong dress—yet even that would not help her, for it only meant the renewed agony of having to select a substitute.

3

When they returned to Lebanon—they were now living in the town itself—she would put it on as unobtrusively as possible next time she went out with Brand. She had heard there were men who never noticed what their wives wore,

but Brand, alas, was not one of them. He was interested in clothes. He would see a woman looking attractive in some article of apparel and he would say to his wife: "Why don't you get yourself that sort of thing, Emma? I like it."

And Emma would say, making quick mental comparisons between her own face and figure and the face and figure Brand was admiring: "I don't think it's quite my style, Brand."

But what, she would ask herself angrily, what was her style? She had none.

Brand, dear fellow, never seemed to notice that. Or did he, and was he too subtle to let her realize it? To this day she did not know if Brand were subtle or not. She had an habitual way of feeling that she could walk right round his unseeing mind, and yet, now and then, he would startle her by the revelation of an understanding of something she had thought quite hidden from him.

But there were other times when she had a more disturbing thought. Perhaps he did not really care. Perhaps he did not demand—or even want—in her what he might have had in

Mary. Perhaps all this agonizing over trifles was a mere useless stupidity.

In the end, she would wear her new dress as if it were something rather old and shabby. But Brand would say, even in the presence of strangers: "Hullo, Emmie, isn't that something new?"

She could see he wanted to make her happy, but she would suffer a deep embarrassment as she answered, as casually as she could: "I got it a little while ago," and then she would quickly talk of something else.

Although Brand was always urging her to buy herself pretty things, although he often told her that he wanted his wife to be the best-dressed woman he knew, although he even went to the length of shopping on her behalf—there was this about him: he never hurt her by deprecating her own unsuccessful purchases.

All the women she knew considered her lucky to be married to Brand van Aardt.

And indeed she was lucky.

Only she wished sometimes, in those days, that Brand had had less to give her in a material

way. She could not bear to think that she benefited more than he by their contract of marriage. She did not consider the question of love: even that was the possession of the lover and not of the beloved. Even that was her gain, not his. She had come to him to fill a gap in his life. But was that enough?

4

If only Mary could have foreseen that, Emma thought sometimes, if she could have foreseen Brand's success, how things might have been different for all of them.

For, as if chains had been removed from him, hardly had Mary gone out of Brand's life, than he began to advance.

It was Emma, however, who gave him the stimulus.

They were travelling from Johannesburg to Lebanon shortly after their marriage, and she was looking through the window of their compartment at the miles and miles of untilled earth. It seemed to stretch away into infinity, and shrubs and trees and wild flowers grew

there luxuriantly, but man was represented neither by his kind nor by his work.

"Who owns all this land?" she asked Brand. "And for what is it being held?"

Brand told her that it was the possession of men who had inherited ground or bought it cheap, and who had not the money, the industry, or the enterprise to cultivate it. They were waiting, in helpless indolence, for purchasers.

"It lacks value because there is so much of it," said Emma. "Someone ought to buy it and re-sell it in little farms."

That was the origin of Brand's scheme to take options on these vast estates, parcel them out, and sell them as something limited and rare. He knew the kind of soil it was. Oranges might grow there, or apples or mealies or potatoes or cotton. People were only just beginning to take cotton seriously in South Africa.

He spoke to one or two of the more prominent business men in Lebanon about it.

"The idea is still new enough to be profitable," he said, "but not so new as to be risky. The land really is good. When once it is opened up, it will legitimately rise as it has done

in the Cape and round the Durban coast. All kinds of people will buy a hundred acres who won't buy a thousand: people with limited money, and people with a little money that they can't turn to any particular use. We could plant the land for them. We could undertake to build them houses. We could spread ourselves in every direction. . . . In time, of course."

He watched them assimilating his ideas while he pointed out that, although small, dirty companies had been known to go in for land-selling, so, too, had big, reputable companies. . . .

A quality that no one had hitherto suspected in Brand was developing in him: ambition. He wanted to get on. Mary had shaken his spirit and depreciated his faith in himself; his farm had absorbed his energies—it was as if he had never before felt the power, the freedom, to rise.

But Emma had said to him: "You go on with the big business, Brand. I'll help you through with the farm."

And he had gone on with the big business.

Within a few years Brand was an important man in Lebanon; they were living in the town

itself; his own little inherited farm, which he would not sell because he was sentimentally attached to it, was in the care of a manager.

It was this very farm towards which they were now driving. To-day the Glenns were living there.

CHAPTER VI

I

All the time the Glenns were in England—and that was a long time because eight months after Mary's marriage the European war broke out and Elliott joined the forces, while his wife remained with his mother—all the five years they were away from Lebanon Emma thought uneasily about Brand's old love for Mary.

Every now and then Mrs. Adams gave to anyone who cared to hear it—and even to some who did not care to hear it—news of Mary. She was having a wonderful time in London, a most luxurious time. She was meeting such interesting people, she was visiting at country houses, she was attending all kinds of important functions. Mrs. Adams lived for her weekly letter from Mary. Never, in all the five years

Mary was absent from Lebanon, did she miss a mail.

A year after her marriage she announced the birth of a son. John Adams Glenn, he was called in the first letter. But afterwards he was referred to as Jackie.

"She's proud of her poor old father and mother," said Mrs. Adams to her husband. "You see she's given him our name."

But when she repeated the remark to Emma, Emma had a little irresistible thought. What, she wondered, was Mary conveying to strangers by that "Adams"?

She told Brand about Mary's son, and watched his face with jealous anxiety for any trace of emotion. She hoped that their child, when it came, would be a son, too, and not a daughter. The Old Testament tradition in Brand's Dutch blood might crave a son.

But he seemed quite calmly indifferent about the whole business, as if Mary's affairs meant nothing to him.

2

It was the only happiness poor Mrs. Adams was having these days—her pride in Mary's prosperity. For Mr. Adams was ill with diabetes, and it was only a matter of holding off the end a shorter or a longer time. He was still, perforce, going on with his work, but he was unable to give satisfaction. For one thing he had not the strength, and, for another thing, he was always in a bad state of nerves. He would throw his vegetables at his Indian clients, saying angrily: "Well, if you want the stuff for nothing, have it this way." He grew very thin, was always agonizingly thirsty, and would not maintain his diet rigorously enough.

To begin with, it was an expensive affair. He had to have substitutes for various kinds of ordinary foods, and he had to take certain mineral waters. And then, he would get impatient and break out and eat just whatever he wanted to eat.

Mrs. Adams would beseech him, in a helpless

agony, to be careful, but he would say savagely: "You leave me alone, Bertha. I won't be careful, and I won't be pestered about it. What sort of a life is it anyhow?"

But the consequence of his laxity would soon be apparent, and he would accuse his wife bitterly of not worrying about him, of not giving him suitable food, of not making whatever he could eat attractive enough to exorcise temptation, of not helping him to maintain his resistance.

She would accept his reproaches meekly, and later he would come back to her and beg her pardon in a shaking voice, and she would put her arms round him and say: "My poor boy, my poor little husband, I don't blame you."

They would vow themselves to a renewed battle against the fatal sugar.

3

But presently Mr. Adams had to give up his work. He was allowed a small pension, yet not enough for them to live on, and Mrs. Adams decided to take in a few boarders. Mary's room

was vacant, and their precious parlour might also be used—even two or three boarders would help.

But nobody found it very pleasant to live in the same house with Mr. Adams, and the one or two who did try did not stay long. Soon Mrs. Adams was in so desperate a position that she was compelled to write to Mary for assistance. Never, never, she vowed, would she have done it for herself, but she dared not let her husband suffer for her pride and love—and what to Mary, living there in affluence, did a few pounds matter?

Mary sent the money—not quite as much as her mother had expected, still enough, when combined with their pension, when handled very economically, to make it possible for them to live.

But then Mary did not realize, thought Mrs. Adams, that her father was so ill. She had vaguely suggested that his health was not what it had been (and that might mean anything), and had given the fact that he was now pensioned off as the reason for her application to

Mary. The pension, Mrs. Adams had said, with literal truth, was insufficient for their needs.

4

When Mary had been away in England four years Mr. Adams died.

Now Mrs. Adams was left alone in Lebanon, and, in the months that followed, the change that, during the last few years, had gradually been taking place in her, became suddenly marked. She was no longer the buxom, hearty woman Mary had left behind her, she was truly aged.

Mr. Adams's pension had ceased with his death, but he had left a life policy for one thousand pounds, and with this money Mrs. Adams extended her house and, in part, refurnished it, and again made an attempt to run a boarding-house. This time she was more successful, for Mr. Adams was not there to distress the guests with his illness and temper.

Mary wrote out in great grief saying that she would return to South Africa as soon as she could; but that while Elliott was in France she

did not want to be so far away from him. And, indeed, within a few months of the ending of war she was back in Lebanon.

For weeks before her arrival Mrs. Adams went about half-dazed. She was too full of joy, too full of sorrow, too full of excitement. Soon there would come to Lebanon her important son-in-law whom she had known only for two days in Cape Town when she accompanied Mary to her wedding; and the little dear grandson of whom all Mary's letters were full—she seemed hardly to write of anything else; and Mary herself, no longer a girl, but a married woman, a woman of the world. How handsome and fashionable she would be, thought Mrs. Adams, how Lebanon would crawl at her feet!

And handsome and fashionable Mary certainly was when, at last, she arrived at Lebanon station, and a woman of the world too. And yet she was not what her mother had expected. Her maternity, her five years of added maturity, did not seem to have developed her in the natural, comfortable way. She was thinner, much thinner, than she had been as a girl, and her face was haggard. Her colour, Mrs. Adams

noticed with horror, was put on, and her beautiful dark eyes had an anxious look.

But they ran towards one another, smiling with their hearts clogged, and then Mary pushed forward her husband and her son.

Mrs. Adams shook hands with her son-in-law with diffidence, though she noticed, behind her embarrassment, that there was something friendly and solicitous in his smile.

But Jackie came up to—exceeded—her hopes. He was a beautiful child. He resembled Mary, thought Mrs. Adams, but he had his father's engaging smile.

5

Mrs. Adams had given one of her boarders notice, and now Mary and Elliott had his room and Jackie's new bed was placed beside his grandmother's old four-poster.

Mary was not as communicative as her mother had expected her to be. She seemed, somehow, weary and dispirited, as if she did not wish to talk. Only when the people of Lebanon came to call, as they all did now, would she

suddenly brighten and talk with animation. It was just, they told one another, like reading a society paper, and they listened to Mary with undisguised deference. Indeed, so far beyond them did she seem to have gone now with her new English accent, her little artificial laugh, and her knowledge of styles and titles, that their respect almost ostracized her as before their contempt had done.

But with Emma she was almost the old Mary. Before they had proceeded very far in their talk, they were discussing their babies, and that made everything simple between them.

Jackie came in.

"This is your Auntie Emma," said Mary, and Jackie moved spontaneously towards Emma, offered his mouth for a kiss, and at once monopolized the conversation. He spoke extremely well for his four years.

He told Emma about his experiences on the ship, and Emma asked him how he liked coming to his new grannie.

"I love it," he said vehemently. "I love it. I love this grannie much better than my other

grannie, and the house and the garden and everything. I didn't——"

"Show Auntie Emma your new doggie," said Mary quickly, so quickly that Emma looked up in surprise. It seemed as if Mary did not want him to say any more.

Jackie ran out obediently to fetch his dog, and was back in a moment. It was a little black-and-tan mongrel with a pug-like face.

"My grannie gave him to me," he told Emma. "Isn't he beautiful?"

"What do you call him?" asked Emma.

A smile appeared on Mary's face. He saw it and flushed, and his eyes grew wet.

"Hasn't he got a name?" Emma continued encouragingly, as he remained silent.

"Yes, he has," said Jackie.

"And what is it?"

He looked from his mother to Emma.

"Pansy," he said defiantly.

Emma received the information with a serious face. The anxiety left his eyes. He sighed with relief. "It's a nice name for a dog, isn't it?" he asked.

"Very," agreed Emma. "Did you give it to him yourself?"

"Yes. But only you and me and grandma think it's nice. The other people laugh. And Mummy says sometimes it's a girl's name. It isn't always a girl's name, is it? A little boy might be called after a he-pansy, mightn't he?"

"I don't see why not; and one day I'll tell you about a flower that was called after a man. But what made you think of Pansy?"

"Because he looks like a pansy, Auntie Emma. I'll show you the pansy I mean. I saw it in Grannie's garden."

He hurried out and returned with a black and brown pansy.

"You see, Auntie Emma. Don't they look just the same?"

And, indeed, there was a reasonable resemblance between the black-and-tan pug-faced dog and the pansy.

"You never explained that to me, Jackie," said Mary with jealousy in her voice.

"Because you laughed, Mummy."

She caught him up to her with his dog and his flower. She was taut with passion for the

child. Here, thought Emma, was at last something which Mary could unreservedly love. . . .

And, as she sat now, five and a half years later, beside her husband on the way to Mary, Emma remembered that fierce gesture.

CHAPTER VII

I

WHAT Mrs. Adams discovered soon was that Mary had not brought so many fashionable things with her as, considering her love for clothes, one might have expected; and, if one looked into them, they had not all that air of having been poured ready out of a mould which distinguishes, for better or worse, articles bought in a shop. They looked as if human fingers had been at them. They looked—Mrs. Adams knew the signs, Mary's rather slap-dash methods of finishing-off a garment—they looked as if they had been made by Mary herself.

She wished she might speak to Mary about this thing and about other things. She knew so little concerning Elliott and his circumstances. How rich were they really? What was Elliott going to do in South Africa?

But there was a reserve in Mary. Her mother could not question her.

A month passed, and another month, and still no mention was made of their position or their plans.

Every night, however, the Glenns dressed for dinner. That impressed Lebanon very much. No other people in Lebanon dressed, as a regular thing, for dinner. They dressed, of course, if there was a dance or some sort of an "affair," but they visited one another in the evening in whatever they happened to be wearing. They were not at all—even those who came from what some of the Dutch too called "home" —like the solitary Englishman of whom one heard that, in his lonely outpost, he maintained the rigorous conventions of the dinner-table. If it was a question of dinner, of meeting strangers at dinner, an enquiry would be awkwardly fluttered over the telephone: "Do we dress?" Even Mrs. Delaporte had not been able to persuade her husband to do so every evening. He preferred to put on his old sports coat instead.

It was really rather a difficult position. One

always had to ask who else was coming, and to find out if it was necessary to change. Otherwise it might happen very easily that half the party was dressed, and the other half not. Or one might amiably stroll round in one's old linen suit only to find that one had ruined the appearance of a whole correct and dignified assembly.

Imagine, then, the awe of Lebanon when it learnt that Mary and Elliott never appeared in Mrs. Adams's little boarding-house dining-room without the appropriate costume. . . .

Not, really, that it was so very appropriate in Mrs. Adams's dining-room. The other guests —the paying guests—just wore their ordinary clothes, and it made them feel uncomfortable, it put a great constraint on them, to mark the distinction between the Glenns' wear and their own.

And then it certainly looked very odd in Mrs. Adams's stuffy little dining-room with the ugly lace curtains, the chipped cruet-stands, the old-fashioned photographs on the walls, and Mrs. Adams's wholesome but very casually served food.

Mrs. Adams was too proud of her daughter and her son-in-law to suggest that their dressing caused her inconvenience. But she could not help seeing how subdued her boarders were these days. And when one of her young men gave her notice, mumbling some unintelligible excuse, and moved to a distinctly worse boarding-house, she knew the reason for his going; and, what was worse, she was not able to fill the vacancy he had left.

2

At the end of three months only five of Mrs. Adams's nine boarders remained, and she felt she could no longer keep silence. It was not just barely the matter of the evening clothes—though that was the most direct difficulty, it was also that Mary would not be friendly with the other boarders, and the whole easy-going atmosphere was gone. Now Mrs. Adams was not paying her way; she was, indeed, with these beloved guests of hers to feed, distinctly going backwards. "It isn't, Mary my darling, that I don't love to see you looking nice, or that I want you to speak to people who aren't your

class; and I know what a gentleman Elliott is; but your dressing scares them. They aren't accustomed to it. It makes them feel they can't be free and easy."

"But, mother," said Mary, flushing deeply, "what nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense. They're leaving me. And what can it be else? The food is even better since you came."

It was better, Mrs. Adams thought uneasily, better than she could afford.

Mary turned away abruptly, saying in a hushed, thick voice: "I'll speak to Elliott."

They appeared next evening in their daytime clothes, and Elliott said to his mother-in-law: "I'm most sorry to have caused you any inconvenience. I wish—is there anything I can do to assist you?"

His eyes looked honestly into hers. For the first time she felt herself humanly near him, and she answered him with quick emotion:

"No, my dear. No. No."

"But it would give me great pleasure. I might—I might—help you with the carving."

Mary had actually boasted to the people in Lebanon of her husband's carving.

"It's done in the kitchen, my dear," said Mrs. Adams.

"I can do it there," said Elliott; and, overriding all his mother-in-law's protests, he did do it there.

3

But it did not help. Dressed or not dressed, his gentlemanly presence in Mrs. Adams's house was a hindrance to her guests' comfort. It was not enough that Mary was haughty, Elliott too had a certain inaccessibility. It was really rooted in shyness. But no one knew that; the talk was that he put on airs, and they resented it.

Another guest left; and, what was worse in Mary's eyes, the story of Elliott's carving, the wisdom of which she had always distrusted, got about Lebanon.

She could see it in the attitude of the people she met. They were not thinking of him any longer as Captain Glenn, they were thinking of him as Mrs. Adams's son-in-law who carved in the kitchen.

And they were wondering, Mary knew, why the Glenns were staying so long in Lebanon. Yes, of course, they were wondering.

In these days Mary grew even thinner and more worn-looking, and there was a lump in her throat that would not go away. But she went on talking in her new English accent, and laughing her unnatural little laugh, and she held herself very, very proudly towards the people of Lebanon.

CHAPTER VIII

I

She began to make general explanations about their position. The strain of the war was still on Elliott. His nerves were not right. He proposed presently to fulfil his original intention of farming in South Africa.

"You ought to speak to Brand van Aardt about that," said Mrs. Adams. "His land-selling company is doing big work."

"To Brand?" said Mary, and there was an angry note in her voice. "Why should I speak to Brand?"

Mrs. Adams looked at her in confusion.

"I mean Elliott, of course. Not you. Elliott should speak to Brand, I mean."

"Is Brand the only person who has land to sell?" Mary demanded.

"Well, he's the most important. And, besides, he would do his best for you."

At that Mary turned on her mother with real fierceness.

"I don't want Brand to do his best for me. I don't want his favours. I don't want anybody's favours. If you think, mother, we're staying on like this here waiting for people to help us you're mistaken. I've told you myself, it's only because—because——"

"But, Mary," Mrs. Adams protested, "I never said anything about favours. I know—about the war and Elliott's nerves and all that. Everyone knows how it is with men who've come back from the war. They're upset, and they can't settle down, and nobody expects——"

"It's not a question of not being able to settle down," Mary interrupted.

Mrs. Adams looked at her daughter in bewilderment. She could not answer. Whatever she said seemed to be wrong.

"You can't ask a man," Mary went on, "to commit himself in a new country before he has had a chance to look round."

"Certainly not," Mrs. Adams acquiesced eagerly. So eagerly that Mary's mouth twisted

in ironical appreciation of her mother's anxiety to placate her.

"I can imagine," she said bitterly, "the way they must be gossiping about us here in Lebanon. What a miserable hole it is. How I hate it, hate it, hate it! I wish I'd never seen it again. Who would believe there could be such jealousy and snobbery in a little back-veld town. Mother, I tell you, if it hadn't been for you——"

"My dear. Yes, yes. You were always a good daughter to me. No woman ever had a better. The way you never missed a mail, and helped us when your poor father——"

Suddenly they were both weeping.

"Oh, mother," Mary sobbed. "I don't know what we're going to do, Elliott and I. I don't know what's going to happen to us. We're finished. We haven't a bean in the blessed world."

2

"It's true about Elliott's family," she went on presently. "At least, his mother—there's no

one else. She's a disagreeable old woman, and she doesn't like me. But she *is* a lady, even if she doesn't live in a big way with country houses and things. She has a little flat in London, and she just manages to come out in her income; and, during the war, I had to live with her and work. I took a man's place in an office."

"But you sent us money every month!"

"Whatever I could afford. That's what used to annoy her. She couldn't bear to think that I was the sort of person who had people to whom one needed to send money. . . . And then, I didn't earn very much, and, although I had Elliott's allowance, there was Jackie, and living was so expensive."

Mrs. Adams could think of just one thing.

"Sent us your poor money. Oh, Mary, I'd never have taken it if I'd known."

"Well, but you had to have it."

She was quieter now. Her humiliating confession was over, and her mother was seeing only beauty where she herself had seen only ugliness.

"And Elliott?" Mrs. Adams ventured after

a while. "What was Elliott doing in Cape Town when you first met him?"

"He *was* looking for a farm—but not—in the way I let you think. He came out here as somebody's secretary, and he had an idea he'd like to give up that sort of work (he was so sick of it, and it was leading to nothing); and he hoped he might get taken on by a farmer, and see if he couldn't do better at that."

There was a hostile expression on Mrs. Adams's face. Mary hurried on:

"But he couldn't find anything to suit him. We didn't have the grand honeymoon I wrote about. We both had to work when we got to England."

"He shouldn't have married you on nothing," Mrs. Adams interjected.

"It was my fault."

The artificial colour stared out from Mary's pale face, and her voice was husky.

"I let him think, before we got engaged, that father was an important sort of man in Lebanon. I didn't exactly tell him so, but he got the idea that things would be arranged here for us in Lebanon."

Mrs. Adams wanted to ask Mary if that was why Elliott had married her, but she said instead:

"What kind of things? He should have known better. He wasn't a baby."

Mary had abandoned much of her pride today, but her husband was her last stronghold.

She stood up, and said in an aloof, hard voice:

"What do you mean by that, mother?"

Mrs. Adams would not withdraw now.

She saw Mary's life lying about her in ruins, and she blamed Elliott for it. What was Mary five years ago? A child. And he—he came from the big world. It was all very well for Mary to defend him, but he had had nothing to offer her; and he had taken her in her lovely youth for what he thought she had to offer.

She repeated stubbornly: "You heard what I said. He had no business to marry you."

"But I made him," cried Mary. "I made him. I wanted to get away from Lebanon. What chance had I here? And he was a gentleman. He *is* a gentleman. No one in Lebanon has got an accent like his, or such good manners.

I've told you before [and, indeed, she had told everyone], he's been to an English public school. I thought if we went back to England we'd manage somehow. And we did, particularly while the war was on. Elliott got a commission, and I had a separation allowance. And I didn't mind working because everyone was working."

Mrs. Adams made an attempt to readjust her conception of Elliott. He was not bad then, only weak, completely under Mary's domination.

"After the war was over, it was different," Mary went on. "Everything was upset. Elliott didn't know what to do with himself. And I had a longing for South Africa. It seemed so far away from the war, and peaceful. Not Lebanon. I didn't mean to come back to Lebanon, except just to see you. But South Africa. I felt I couldn't go on living without the sun."

He did as Mary decided, Mrs. Adams thought: from Africa to England; from England to Africa—whatever she proposed. She began to feel a little sorry for Elliott. She remembered his solicitous, deferential smile;

his diffident, interested way of listening. It was not because he *had* to live with her that he was like that. He would, she felt, always be the same to everyone. . . .

And poor Mary craving the sun! She could understand that, from what she had heard of England.

They looked at one another, emotionally weary.

"But now," said Mary, "we're staying with you, and costing you money, and turning the whole house upside down, and driving your people away. We're ruining you."

Mrs. Adams shook her head, denying she did not know what, for Mary was speaking the obvious truth.

"Yes," said Mary, "I know we are. And don't think Elliott hasn't been trying to get work these last few months. But the men are all coming back from the war and wanting their old places, and he has written perhaps fifty applications for one thing and another without success. . . . It isn't the same, when you get to the spot, as it seems when you're far away."

"You should speak to Brand," Mrs. Adams

suggested again in her helplessness. He was the only man she knew who had any power. . . . And Mary might have married him, and been the most prosperous woman in Lebanon, and she had chosen instead—an accent and manners! Mrs. Adams had a recurring flash of hate for Elliott, and a bitter feeling against Emma for having taken possession of what should have belonged to her own daughter. . . .

Mary walked to the door before answering. Then she turned to her mother with a white, taut face:

"Mother, if you want me not to leave your house and go—and go—I don't know where, don't mention Brand to me again. I'll die before I take any help from Brand van Aardt."

3

And yet, in the end, it was from Brand that help came. This very farm which Brand and Emma were now approaching was, for the Glenns, the practical outcome of that help.

Emma remembered, as she saw, in the distance, the avenue of tall blue-gums that she and

Brand had planted in the first year of their marriage ten years ago, she remembered how happy she had been that they could do something for Mary. But she could not, to this day, decide whether that satisfaction was not connected, in some way, with her jealousy of Brand's first love. Was it because she had ceased to be jealous of Mary that she had begged Brand to do what he could for the Glenns? Or was it because she still recalled the old jealousy that it subtly pleased her to be magnanimous?

And there was a further division. Did it please her to be magnanimous to the Glenns—to mortify herself, or, on the contrary, to aggrandize herself? Did she subconsciously think: "Mary might have had everything from Brand, and now she can only have a little through me," and was there a kind of gloating in the idea, the nauseating benevolence of the visitor? She hoped not; she believed not—a sense of irony perhaps; a pity on Mary's behalf, and a gratitude on her own behalf—but not, even in those days, any unpleasant aftermath of rivalry.

Why, only an hour ago, as they had left Lebanon, she had had much the same idea in

considering how Mary, having wantonly given Brand up, to-day, in her need, turned to him. And, certainly, she did not now regard, with anything but equanimity, Brand's old love for Mary.

4

Yet she had, undoubtedly, been nervous about Mary's return from England. However devoted Brand was as a husband, it was still impossible to forget that he had frankly come to her because he had lost Mary.

For weeks before Mary was due back in Lebanon Emma had gone about accompanied by fear. Brand had never seen Mary since her marriage to Elliott Glenn. What if now his old feeling for her were reawakened?

Emma had a vision of Mary coming from England, so beautiful, so elegant, so experienced. She compared the picture Mary would make with the picture she herself would make—a square little woman who had put on weight with the birth of children, a plain and dowdy little woman.

If only Mary were not so much more attractive than she was! . . .

She used to lie awake at night thinking about beauty, about how impossible it was to struggle for or against it.

To be beautiful was like being aristocratic, she thought, in blood or mind. The only things for which one was genuinely admired were those for which one had not had to struggle. The other kind of admiration was really founded on contempt. The self-made man, the self-made beauty, the genius that had cost infinite pains, received their forced tributes, but at bottom they were despised. It was the people who were born, not made; the people who had inherited and not earned, before whom the world prostrated itself.

Not, exactly, that the world of Lebanon had prostrated itself before Mary, she reflected. Mary's beauty was not as triumphant as all that. It could not overcome the social prejudices of a small town. But she had, at any rate, once conquered what was all the world to her, Emma —she had conquered Brand. And now, with her natural graces fortified by her distinguished

marriage (that was still what everyone believed in Lebanon), and her knowledge of big cities, how would anyone withstand Mary?

What was to be done about it? Emma could not think. She examined her reflection in mirrors with angry contempt; she stood at her wardrobe door considering helplessly her futile, uninteresting accumulations of clothes . . . no, it was useless. She could not, physically, at any rate—and it seemed to her now that nothing else mattered—compete with Mary.

It was not that she believed, for a moment, that Brand might swerve from his marital allegiance. She had no need to call up sentimental pictures of home and children to reassure herself here. Brand would not cease to be faithful to her—and, whatever people might say, her heart told her that it was still the physical, and not the spiritual, betrayal which was the ultimate betrayal. Yet, even then, how satisfactory would it be to have his duty when Mary had his love?

It had seemed so simple, with Mary married and away from Lebanon, she wanted Brand so much herself—it had even been a kind of ad-

venture to help him combat his feeling for Mary. But now—what now?

Not less than Mrs. Adams was Emma occupied with the return of Mary.

CHAPTER IX

I

And then Mary had come, and the very next day Emma had gone to see her, and as if it had been a dream, her fear had fallen away from her. Mary's haggard face, with its brightened cheeks and lips, had made her feel that her own anxiety was a mere romantic folly. Mary had deeper things to consider than the amusement of re-establishing her attraction for Brand.

The painful, jealous way in which she had snatched Jackie to her because he had confided in Emma, and not in her, the reason why he called his dog Pansy, denoted a lack of fulfilment in another direction. And when, later, she saw Mary together with her husband, she knew where that lack of fulfilment lay.

Mary did not love her husband. Not only did she not love him, she despised him. And

that, indeed, was her basic feeling for Elliott—contempt. On this their whole association was grounded. Emma could see it in Mary's artificially pleasant attitude towards Elliott, in Elliott's wistful, propitiating attitude towards Mary. It was as if Elliott had done something to her which she could not forgive, and they both knew it.

Not that, by any word or action, Mary suggested this. On the surface Mary was simply the secure wife, and Elliott the devoted husband. Even more than that. By the things she said, Mary was the proud wife, and Elliott the source of her pride. She told the people in Lebanon about his public school life, about his war service. A well-known name would be mentioned. "Oh, my husband met him at such and such a house" (as, in fact, he had, during the period of his secretaryship). Or, again quite truthfully, "He was a brother officer of my husband's." Or, as most people might have said during the war, "My husband knew, of course, that this or that was bound to happen.

He had confidential information about it from So-and-so."

She would describe the things they had done during Elliott's leaves—the exciting, social kind of things. Titles dropped from her lips. Mary and Elliott, it seemed, had been "in" everything.

And it was not, Emma knew, that Mary was exactly lying. There was no reason why, during war time, and with Elliott an officer, the stories she told need have lacked foundation. It was only—Emma knew Mary—that she had a way of putting facts in certain lights which gave them a particular effect.

Those were the days, just after her return, when Mary's attitudes impressed the people of Lebanon. They did not enjoy them; they could not bear her boasting; but still, what Mary told them made her go up, if not in their love, then in their veneration.

2

Emma had wondered how she would be able to discuss Mary—not the dim, absent Mary, but

the real, newly returned Mary—with her husband. Brand had been away in the country when Mary came back to Lebanon. Emma would otherwise have insisted on his accompanying her on her visit. Because of her very fear, she would have insisted. . . .

But when he arrived home the next day he smiled at Emma as he said: "Well, have you seen her?"

Emma nodded.

"And how was it?"

"She's changed, Brand. And things are not as they should be between her and her husband."

Despite herself, Emma watched Brand's face as she spoke. Brand, however, enquired calmly:

"What sort of a man is Glenn?"

"Not a bad man, I'm sure," said Emma. "But you'll see. They're coming to dinner tonight."

It was only two days since the Glenns' arrival in Lebanon, and Brand and Emma had not yet heard about the dressing for dinner.

When accordingly Mary and Elliott walked in—she in a low-cut fashionable dress, and he in the black and white of evening, there was a feel-

ing—not exactly of embarrassment, but rather of self-consciousness—over three of the party.

Emma was wearing the pleasant but undistinguished kind of silk dress she usually put on in the afternoon, and Brand was in a tussore suit. But it was not because the guests were in evening clothes, and not the hosts, that they all of them, except Elliott, felt self-conscious. It was because Brand and Emma and Mary herself knew that this dressing of hers was a pose, and that she was trying to impress them. She had not, in five years, forgotten the innumerable dinners they had had together when they would as soon have put on evening-dress as fancy-dress. . . . Emma had a sudden vision of Mr. Adams, in his shabby old clothes, with his hands all dirty through handling vegetables, standing on a market-table acclaiming his wares in a shouted garble of words, and making pointless persiflage with his Indian bidders. And something in Emma's non-committal, yet meditative glance communicated itself to Mary, and she too felt herself flung back on the past.

But she laughed her little new laugh and cried: "Oh, isn't it lovely to see Brand van

Aardt again?" She looked from her husband to herself. "You don't mind our dressing, do you? One gets so into the habit over there. . . . Elliott, how do you like my dear old Brand?"

She was being coy, she was being false, she was hating herself as she spoke in a voice that would not sound normal.

The men smiled at one another. How strong and assured Brand looked beside Elliott, Emma thought. And Mary had preferred Elliott! . . . Her mind jumped to the fact that, just as she was comparing Brand with Elliott, so must Brand be comparing her with Mary.

She answered Mary's remark about the dressing. "It's jolly to see such a pretty frock in Lebanon. I'm so glad you put it on, Mary. You look lovely in it."

There was something in Mary's strained expression that had moved her to sudden pity. Poor old Mary: she could never get away from the necessity of pretending.

She put her arm about her. "Come to my room while the men get to know each other. And I want to show you the babies."

At dinner Mary said: "Well, Brand, what is all this I hear about your becoming a millionaire?" She smiled as she spoke, but there was a tense note in her voice.

"You're just a pound or two out," said Brand. "But still, it was a good idea Emma had."

Emma looked at him quickly. He had made that remark deliberately, she could see.

"What idea?" said Mary.

"This land business."

"Tell me about that, van Aardt," said Elliott. "It's what I'm interested in."

A look of contemptuous anger flashed across Mary's face as she turned her eyes on her husband. *He* was interested in the land business, the penniless ex-secretary!

"Oh no," she said hurriedly. "Don't let us talk business to-night. There are so many other things we have to say to one another. . . . Brand and Emma are my very best and oldest friends, you know, Elliott."

It was as if something in Mary forced her to assert a connection with Brand. She spoke in play, but her heart was full of remembrance of

the time when Brand might have been hers; and her feelings trickled through her words. It was not that she loved Brand. It was only that she had lost him, and he had prospered. It was only that, having given him up, she herself had failed to prosper.

They spoke about their children, about the war, about things and people. But Mary, with her new English accent, monopolized almost the whole conversation, as if she could not face the blankness of silence, as if silence were the death of human intercourse.

Afterwards Emma and Brand walked to the garden gate with their guests, and it was as they turned back towards the house that Emma said to her husband in a too controlled voice:

"And now, Brand?"

He put his arms around her, and kissed her among the trees.

"Brand . . . is it all right?"

"There is no one but you in the world, Emma. I knew it before to-night."

They began to walk back.

"But all those years when Mary was there, and not I?" said Emma.

"Those things become dreams, like everything else in the past. And then, as any man can tell you, love without marriage has little chance beside love with marriage—only as much chance as most illusions. Marriage is so real: for better or worse, it makes shadows of other things."

3

It was before the story of Elliott's carving got about Lebanon that Emma told her husband what she suspected of the Glenns' position:

"Brand, Mary would never go on staying like this in Lebanon if they were not in utter need. You know Mary: how she hates Lebanon, how she would do anything in the world rather than have the people here suspect that things are not going well with them. The Glenns must be in a bad way."

"I'm afraid so too," said Brand. "There are rumours going about that Glenn is looking for something to do, and can't get it."

"But what *can* he do? It's so hard to know from Mary's talk exactly what his work was

before the war. One simply gathers from her that he wants to farm in a gentlemanly way."

"If he had any capital at all——" mused Brand.

"He can't have."

"What then?"

"Isn't there some sort of place for him on your company?"

Brand smiled. "A directorship, do you mean?"

"I don't know what I mean," Emma admitted. "But they can't go on like this."

She had a queer feeling of responsibility towards Mary, as if she owed her something for letting her have Brand.

"But how can I suggest anything?" said Brand. "First of all, I don't know what to suggest. I can't create jobs for Glenn." (Strange, thought Emma, that Brand was less moved by Mary's position than she herself was. He had loved her with marriage in his mind. He had married someone else. No lingering sentimentalities disturbed his serenity.) "And then," added Brand, "he might simply consider it offensive of me to go butting in."

"Still—if you have the chance——" said Emma.

"Of course, if I have the chance——" agreed Brand.

4

They had more definite knowledge of Elliott's position when Mrs. Adams came to see Brand. Her visit was a secret from Mary. She told Brand so at once. "You know Mary," she said, as Emma had done. "She's so proud. When I asked her to speak to you herself she said she'd sooner die. And she would never forgive me if she knew I had done it instead."

They were in Brand's white-walled study, with its native stinkwood furniture, and its built-in, laden bookshelves. The great red flowers of a poinsettia were visible through the open window. Behind the flowers the distant mauve mountains faded into the air. The vivid blue sky was flecked with little white clouds. It was so pleasant here that Mrs. Adams ached to think that her poor Mary, who might have had this, had no home at all. She remembered

how Mary, returning that night from the van Aardts, had said: "What a home I could make of it if I had their money! Emma never had any taste," and wondered what there could be in the world better than this; but then, of course, what sort of a judge was she herself? The marvel was how she had had Mary for a daughter.

"Don't you worry, Mrs. Adams," said Brand. "What is it?"

"I'm not breathing a word against my son-in-law, you understand, Brand."

"No, of course not."

"Elliott's a good man. I'm not complaining about him. I'm fond of Elliott. I am, really."

Brand nodded.

"But I must say it doesn't seem to me things can go on like this much longer. It's not that I mind keeping them. As long as I can make ends meet, they're welcome, God knows, to share whatever I have. It's only that——"

She fumbled in her mind for words.

"I quite understand," said Brand.

"They spent their last money," Mrs. Adams continued after a moment, "coming to South Africa. And since they have been here Elliott

has been trying day in and day out to get work to do, and can't."

So the rumours were true then! Mrs. Adams looked at Brand more supplicatingly than she realized.

"Have you any idea," he asked, "what it is he wants to do?"

"Anything," she said eagerly, "anything."

But that meant, of course, thought Brand, anything which would suit such a man as Elliott. Elliott would not, for instance, go behind a shop counter, or do manual work. There was a difference between one man's submission to poverty, and another's; and the world sanctioned the difference.

"Let me think it over, Mrs. Adams," said Brand.

5

He reported Mrs. Adams's visit to Emma.

"You were right," he said to her. "The Glenns are in a desperate position."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Emma.

He smiled. "Is it really my job to do something about it?"

"Who else is there?"

"Well, what do you suggest? Mary is not supposed to know of her mother's visit to me."

"I *have* an idea," said Emma.

"I can't put him in any responsible position," Brand interpolated quickly. "Business is one thing, and friendship is another. I don't know the man's capacities."

Again Emma remarked the strange impartiality with which Brand was able to consider Mary's affairs.

"And you can't offer him anything undignified," she said. "One has to be so tactful with Mary. . . . But work in the company isn't what I meant. I was thinking of our own little farm. That's a permanency. You're not selling that. Why not let the Glenns run that with a good bijwoner?"

"But we have a manager there already," Brand objected.

"Put him somewhere else. You don't have to be tactful with him."

"I love the place, Emma. I don't want it ruined."

"Brand," said Emma, "wouldn't you, at one time, have given all you had to Mary? Do this for her."

Their eyes met. It was one of those moments where people, past the habit of long association, see one another.

"I like you, Emma," said Brand.

6

Emma wondered whether she could have been as generous to Mary in good fortune as in ill fortune. She thought not. She knew life. It was a tournament where people were divided into groups. One strove against the competitors in one's own group for admission into the next group, and there again the struggle began. In the meantime those people classed with oneself were the immediate rivals. They were associates, but they were enemies too. That was why it was so much easier to bear the triumphs of strangers than the triumphs of friends. With strangers it was not a personal matter. One

did not, by them, mark one's progression or retrogression. They belonged to another sphere. They lived in another little bubble.

That was, Emma realized, Mary's attitude towards Lebanon. That was why she hated the people here. She had lived and worked in London, she had seen and felt the great war, but her standard was the standard of Lebanon. It was against Louise Delaporte and herself that Mary was pitted. If Louise was still unmarried, that was a point in Mary's favour. If Emma had a successful husband, that was a point against Mary. It was the game of life.

And everyone played that game—each in his own little section. The actor did not care if the business man got a contract for a million pounds, but he cared if another actor had his name printed in bigger letters. The doctor did not care how many editions the writer achieved, but he was annoyed if a patient of his went to a colleague. The jockey was unmoved by the triumphs of the tennis player, but he noticed it if another jockey weighed a pound less. The housewife (one could go on interminably) was

unperturbed by the successes of the duchess or the sorrows of the washerwoman. The duchess might live in a castle, and she was pleasantly interested. The washerwoman might live in a hovel, and she was mildly sympathetic; but if her friend moved into a better street, then the friend had scored against her personally, and that truly went to her heart. If, on the other hand, the friend had to move to an inferior street, she sympathized in the spirit of a golfer deploring the unfortunate lie of his opponent in a match. "Bad luck, old man," he said solicitously. Nevertheless, the other man's trouble did not spoil his own game. . . .

That was, perhaps, thought Emma, the way she sympathized with Mary. She could afford to pity Mary and wish her well. They were no longer fighting for place. Mary had lost too many points in the game, even although she had not yet arrived at the stage where the hopelessly outclassed player admits with resignation the superiority of his opponent.

But if Mary had come back to Lebanon as everyone had expected she would come back—in the flush of success—would she as easily as

now have forgiven her for being Brand's first love? Would she have responded as readily to a cry of triumph as she was here responding to a cry of distress?

CHAPTER X

I

THAT it was a cry of distress there could be no doubt. Mary would not have sent a Kaffir thirty miles with those few words: "Dear Brand, come at once," if her need had not been urgent.

Ever since, those five years ago, Elliott had accepted Brand's offer to manage his farm, Mary had treated Brand and Emma with a cold, bright hardness, as if they had offended her to the extent of making it rather difficult for her to be polite to them.

And so, indeed, they had offended her. They had hurt her pride by putting themselves above her in the position of benefactors. They were, in the game of life, giving her points. She did not, as she had passionately warned her mother, die because Brand had helped them—one did not so easily die for spiritual reasons, she found

—but she suffered terribly, and not the less terribly because Elliott was so happy to take Brand's offer, so eager and complaisant, so grateful. He came home and told Mary what a splendid, what a charming fellow this old friend of hers was. He did not, in the least, mind admitting, both tacitly and verbally, that Brand was a better man than himself; he took it that it was right for Brand to bestow and for him to accept; he was satisfied that Brand should be the employer and he the employed.

After having been idle for nearly a year he was most eager to get to the farm and begin work. Mary had had to abandon herself to the inevitable, but she did so with a sullen bitterness that he could not understand, that she could not make him understand. When he took out his military riding breeches and leggings and said cheerfully: "These will come in useful again," she did not share his satisfaction; when he walked around the farmhouse considering how they would use the various rooms, she offered no wifely assistance; when he praised the fertility of the farm, she did not participate in his

hopes. She sneered at the handbooks on farming he brought home to study. "The Complete Farmer," she called him, with a little tight, downward smile.

That was the mood in which she settled down on Brand's farm. Nevertheless, as the months passed, she did her best to accommodate herself to her new life. She had a home instinct. She could not live in a house and not try to make it pleasant and comfortable. She could not see the horses and not want to learn riding. There was a tennis court on the farm, and Mr. Russell, the new bank-manager at Lebanon, whom, most fortunately, Elliott had met in France, came out for week-ends. Sometimes he brought a bachelor friend with him. And the combination of the tennis court with Mr. Russell and his occasional friend gave Mary a lever for attracting to the farm some of what were considered the nice girls of Lebanon. They used to play tennis, and have picnics at the Kloof. And Mary felt and acted as if she were a hostess at an English country-house party. She had never been to one—not even with the assistance of the

war—but she had seen pictures of such things in illustrated papers, and she had read about them. . . .

And when next she went to Lebanon she would manage to let everyone know what splendid times they had at the farm, and who came there. She would mention little unimportant incidents or conversations as if she could not resist repeating something so interesting. But it was not that she thought her stories worth telling; it was only that they seemed like nails with which the more firmly to fasten down the impression she was trying to convey.

2

She had to do it all herself too, this struggling for a status. Elliott was no use at all. He did not care whether anyone came to the farm or not. He did not care what the people of Lebanon thought. There was a new magistrate at the Residency now (as well as this new bank-manager whom they already had as a friend), and Mary was trying very hard to win over his

wife. It seemed as if she had here her opportunity to begin all over in Lebanon. But Elliott could not understand why on earth Mary should trouble herself about so commonplace a woman as Mrs. Foster. He did not see in her, as Mary did, the very essence of social existence.

"Well, but even if she did come out to the farm, what good would it do us?" he asked with irritating innocence.

"It would make all the difference," said Mary. "It would mean that we were in."

"In what?"

"In things."

"Things—in Lebanon!"

Elliott did not intend to be contemptuous. He was merely puzzled. He could not see that it made any difference what anybody was in a little town in Africa. A colonial was a colonial, and there was the end of it. He could no more appreciate the subtle gradations Mary found in Lebanon society than he could resolve her attitude towards people of colour. He considered the whole business as an adult considers the manœuvres of a child playing at being grown-up.

Sometimes Mary admired him for this indifference. But at other times she told herself —and him—that it merely exemplified his general attitude towards life, that that was why he had never got on in the world, and never would.

She had been mistaken in Elliott, she saw it now. Because he showed so little on the surface, she thought that there was very much underneath. And the truth was that what he showed was all he had to show.

3

She developed a sarcastic way of regarding him and addressing him. He was a man who occupied himself about the house, who enjoyed making shelves, and putting in panes of glass, and shifting furniture, and arranging meals. Another kind of wife might have expanded in tenderness towards him for his little eager efforts. Yet, even while Mary made use of his domestic capacities, she despised him for them. That was the sort of man he was: he could do the frittering things, but not the big ones. Very frequently she pointed out to him that, while he

was doing such work as any half-caste handyman for five shillings a day could improve upon, Brand was doing work which involved the disposing of thousands of pounds.

"But I don't happen to have a business head," Elliott would say equably, or he would simply not answer at all. Mary herself wondered how, considering the way she treated him, she was able to hold Elliott's affection. And, occasionally, when she had driven him so far that he faced her desolate and speechless, she became a little afraid. Only when he seemed to be slipping away from her—only then did Mary care for Elliott, and put out all her powers to win him back. And did do so.

4

Sometimes she had to ask Emma and Brand to visit her, and then she felt uncomfortable and constrained. She could not, for a moment, forget the relation in which Elliott stood to Brand, nor could she forget the fact that Brand might have been her husband, and not Emma's.

So unbearable was this position of inferiority

in which she found herself, that she had even once or twice thought, with a viciousness which frightened even herself, that the only redress she could have would be to try to revive Brand's old love for her. Then Brand would be once more her servant, and not she his. Then Emma would need to fear her, and not she Emma. Then she would be the queen in the game, and not a pawn. . . .

Since, however, there was nothing of the adventuress in her, she would thrust the idea behind her in Puritan horror. Yet she could not help feeling often that Brand belonged more to her than to Emma—that Emma was the third, the outsider, the interloper. She would remember things she and Brand had done together, in which Emma had not participated, the years of their youth when they had not known of Emma's existence. She would refer to these old days casually, with a laugh: "And so Brand and I," she would say, making a fence round the two of them, and pushing everyone else outside, "did this or that. Those were jolly old times, weren't they, Brand? Don't you wish we could live them over again?"

She spoke with an open-seeming innocence, as if she were just being gay and girlish, but she meant to hurt everyone when she spoke like that: Elliott and Brand and Emma—and even herself. It was herself she was hurting most of all, because not only did she suffer regret, she suffered shame and remorse at her own ingratitude and vulgarity.

It was in such moods that she was kindest to Elliott, that she felt suddenly she was beneath him and warmed his heart with a little praise, with an unexpected consideration. And he, poor fellow, surprised and mystified, would think that there was no one so beautiful, so clever and generous, as his wife Mary.

5

He would have been unable to understand Mary's resentful attitude towards the situation in which she found herself. Why, naturally, an old friend of theirs would want to assist them. Who else? The little whips of scorn with which, in her vicious moments, she lashed him,

sank into the softness where all his feelings were embedded and left no mark.

Nor would he have been able to understand her twisted unhappiness when Brand was elected to the House of Assembly. She had worked hard for him, sitting in his committee rooms and canvassing voters. She had told everyone that he was the best man, and that he was sure to get in. When the results were announced she had gone about saying gaily: "I'm so excited and happy about it. Dear old Brand van Aardt is my very oldest friend. This is the nicest thing that has happened for a long time." And yet, at bottom, she had hoped he would be defeated. She could not bear this persistent success of Brand's. It made her feel sometimes that, in his robust and hearty thirties, he looked bloated. His voice—his decent, honest voice—seemed to her heavy with self-righteousness, and she could not resist making little remarks to him about his colonial accent. Even while it eased her conscience to help him (for she knew gratitude to be her duty), even while she exhausted herself in the labour, even while she

enjoyed the publicity and the social cachet attached to electioneering, and liked to show her intimacy with Brand, there was a raw aching spot of jealousy at the root of her heart. She suffered when she heard of Brand's return.

"He's in," she said to Elliott in a muffled voice, and her hands trembled.

"Yes, good man," said Elliott cordially.

"He is an M.L.A.," she said. "And you are what you always were—nothing."

And not only that. She knew, as she spoke, that he never would be anything. He had not the capacity.

Elliott looked at her in astonishment—not because she had insulted him (he had got into the habit of putting up with what he dismissed as her "moods"), but because he could not understand her attitude towards Brand.

"I say——" he began.

"They'll be living at Cape Town for half the year, and joining in everything. When they come here they'll be entertained, and Emma, in her striped Fuji silk dresses, will be opening bazaars and taking chairs at meetings. . . . And

you and I will be staying here on the farm. their servants."

"Aren't you glad then that he got in?" asked Elliott.

Mary laughed a little bitter laugh.

"It's no use explaining anything to you, Elliott."

She hated his pleasant transparency. People with that secret darkness she felt within herself were, at least, deep. One could not see the bottom of them. But Elliott's clear simplicity she considered to be shallowness. That, too, was why he was weak. How, in her youth, had she been mistaken into thinking his quiet ease meant power?

Now she was glad when Brand and Emma went down to Cape Town for the parliamentary session. She was happier when she did not see them.

Nevertheless, when they came back to Lebanon, she made a point of keeping in touch with them because they were of consequence these days in Lebanon.

It was as if she were climbing a dangerous

mountain. She clung with desperate hands to rocky projections. She clung in pain, with tearing flesh, but she dared not let go for fear of slipping backwards.

CHAPTER XI

I

And now she had sent for them. Why? Emma kept on asking herself. Well, they would know in a few minutes. Already they were driving through the avenue of blue-gums that, planted ten years ago, were a hundred feet tall. And, at the end of the avenue, surrounded by a wall made of loose stones, was the homestead—a long, low, white house, with two gables, a broad verandah, and a corrugated iron roof.

At the gate of the stone wall Mary was standing. It was near evening now, and, for all this was the middle-veld, it was winter, and when the sun went down, it grew cold. Yet Mary was leaning against the gate in a thin dress, without a wrap, heavy with approaching maternity. A little cold wind was blowing upright wisps of her black hair, and her clinging skirts outlined her figure.

Brand stopped the car, and they walked quickly towards her, he and Emma.

"We got your note at half-past four. What is the matter?"

"It's Elliott," said Mary. "Elliott and Jackie. They went shooting ten days ago, and they haven't come back yet."

"When were you expecting them?"

"By Sunday. They're three days late. Elliott promised not to be away more than a week."

"But Jackie?" cried Emma. "How could Jackie go shooting? He's not ten years old!"

"He wanted to go. When Jackie begs me for anything I can't refuse him."

Her voice broke suddenly.

"Oh, God, I wish I hadn't let him. I wish I'd never encouraged Elliott to take it up. Emma, I have a terrible feeling. I know—I know something has happened."

2

Every year, in July, Elliott went shooting. It was part of his status as a gentleman, so Mary

thought, to go shooting. She wouldn't let him kill a pig or a fowl on the farm. But this was different. This was as correct as war. It ranked as a sport. It was the difference between carving in the dining-room and carving in the kitchen. Mary had never forgotten her shame at Elliott's carving for her mother's boarders in her mother's kitchen.

In the district around Lebanon all the best people went, annually, to hunt on the bushveld. Mary would have felt it a social dereliction on her husband's part not to do the same, as if they were out of things. She did not even mind being left on the farm with just the bijwoner's wife for company while he was away. Indeed, she urged him to go. It gave her a satisfaction to think that, in association with an unimpeachable person like Russell, the bank-manager, her husband was manifesting a social tradition.

And so, in mid-winter, they would load up the old Ford, and Elliott and Russell and one of the farm Kaffirs would travel into the bushveld, and, after an absence of a week or so, they would come back with game, the quantity and variety of which was limited only by their licences.

Mary did not greatly care for game, but they would go on eating it and eating it; and some they would dry in strips, and some she would send to her mother, and some she would send to the van Aardts. It was rather distinguished, Mary felt, to send game to one's friends. Why she should have felt it to be distinguished she could not herself have explained, for she knew well enough that not only the best people, but all kinds of people too, went shooting in South Africa. But she had come away from England with that idea, and there it was, lodged in her mind.

It was warmer on the bushveld than in the middle-veld where they lived, and at night the men would sleep out in the open, snug in the sleeping-bags they had brought back with them from the war. They would return home brown and robustly dirty, and with great appetites.

This year, however, Russell had inconveniently chosen to get married during the shooting season, and Elliott was deprived of his usual companion. Nor could he think of a substitute. There were people who had never invited Elliott to join their parties. There were, on the

other hand, people with whom Mary did not wish to become socially involved. Time had slipped away without any definite arrangements having been made. And, indeed, Mary would not on this occasion have been sorry if the annual expedition had fallen through altogether. She was about to have this other child, her nerves were on edge, she dreaded the loneliness.

She had not wanted to have a second child. They had been saving a little money during the last two or three years, and she had been thinking lately that perhaps she would enter Jackie for the Navy. They would concentrate on that. Very few South African boys joined the Navy, and the choice of such a career for Jackie would create a tremendous impression on everyone in the district. In a year or two, she had dreamt, she would take him to England herself, and perhaps she would stay on there for a while. She was not satisfied—if Elliott was—to go on living year after year on a farm, and another man's farm at that. She saw herself with Jackie in England: "My son—in the Navy." She would breast the world, no longer as the daughter of Tom Adams, the Lebanon market-master, or as

the wife of Elliott Glenn, the manager of Brand van Aardt's farm, but as the mother of John Adams Glenn, who was in the Navy. The name, she thought, actually sounded like the name of a successful man—the poor old unimportant Adams, standing there in the middle, gave it, strangely enough, that effect. . . .

At least one thing in her life was not a failure. There was not another child in Lebanon—in all Africa, she secretly believed—to compare with Jackie. Brand's and Emma's sons were nice, freckled boys, but she could not help wondering sometimes if Brand did not wish that Jackie were his son, and not Elliott's. . . .

She was beginning in these days to visualize a future in which Elliott hardly entered at all. . . .

But the coming of the new baby had put an end to all those plans of going to England, had brought Elliott back into the picture. There was the expense of the whole business, there was the uselessness of going to England with a small child, there was Elliott re-attached to her.

3

Now, as she sat on the stoep sewing, she saw in her mind the car-full of dead things the men always brought home, and the idea made her ill to the centre of her being—to the very core, it seemed to her, of the child she was carrying.

Yet she would not prevent Elliott from going if he chose. Just because she did not love him enough, her pride forbade her to stand in the way of his pleasure.

"But who is to come with me?" he pondered. "It's almost too late to arrange anything now. I suppose I'll have to give it up. I can't think of anyone."

As he spoke Jackie looked at him shyly.

"Why don't you take me?" he said. "I'm someone."

Mary smiled at him. Everything Jackie said was beautiful to her. The love which, for a little period, had been Elliott's, was now deflected towards her son. She was almost afraid to touch him for fear that the fierceness of her feeling for him might intensify her clasp, her grasp, to a hurt.

"And who will take care of mother?" she asked. "You remember you stayed to look after me last year."

"Oh yes," he recalled himself to his duty. But the light on his face died out. It was a less amusing form of manliness to guard one's mother than to go hunting with one's father.

But Elliott had been engaged by his son's suggestion.

"Upon my word, why not?" he demanded. "The boy is quite right. He *is* someone. I don't ever want a better companion than Jackie."

Jackie's blue eyes, journeying from parent to parent, were one eagerness. It was a dull life he led here on the farm, taught by his mother, too anxiously guarded by her, without companions.

Mary could not bear to disappoint him. Her voice was uncertain as she spoke.

"It's too strenuous for him, Elliott."

Her uncertainty encouraged Elliott as her confidence always defeated him.

"Not a bit of it," he said heartily. "I don't want any son of mine to be a mollycoddle. Old Jack's as tough as biltong, aren't you?"

He meant those dried strips of meat which they made of their superfluous buck.

"And the nights on the open veld."

"It's warmer there than here—you know that yourself—and he's accustomed to sleeping outside."

"I don't like the idea, Elliott."

"We'll only stay away a week. Not longer, I promise you. And you can have someone in to keep you company."

"I hate having anyone in to keep me company."

Elliott looked at her with his pleasant, solicitous expression, and suddenly abandoned the scheme.

"Why, of course, Mary, if you feel that way——"

"It isn't my feelings, Elliott. I'm not thinking about myself. I'm only afraid it will be too much for Jackie."

She did not like Elliott to suggest that he was sacrificing anything on her behalf. It was her old pride. She did not wish to be so placed in the position of a debtor. Hers, after all, was the rôle of sacrifice.

But Jackie came and stood beside her. He could bear up against temptation no longer. "Won't you let me?" he whispered, ruffling the hair about her ears with his breath that always reminded Mary of fresh milk. "Won't you?"

There was something too touching in his little boy's voice.

"Yes, Jackie. Yes, I'll let you," she said.

CHAPTER XII

I

It was too much happiness. Long before daylight, on the morning they were to leave, Jackie was lying awake, warm with bliss.

He saw himself driving off into the veld, sitting beside his father. The Kaffir would be at the back. Only he and his father and the Kaffir. No women. His mother would not be with them, worrying whether he was too tired or too cold; arranging the muffler round his neck; making him button up his coat; telling him not to eat too many sweets.

They would drive through the drift on the boundary of the farm, and the water would splash over the car, and then they would be on the high road.

On the high road his father would perhaps let him drive. No pretence. No unfair parental guiding of the wheel—the real thing. . . .

In the middle of the day they would make a halt near some little stream—some little spruit. They would take the kaross of jackal skins out of the car to sit on. And they would lift off the basket of provisions his mother had prepared. There would be tea and coffee and sugar and milk—ordinary milk and condensed milk—in the basket. And little packets of salt and pepper. And oranges and paw-paws and bananas. And sweets. And lemonade. And bread. And butter and jam. And tinned fish. And cold chicken.

Cold chicken! Jackie sneered to himself as he thought with contempt of anything as mild and domestic as cold chicken. Soon they would be feasting on the things they had themselves shot. . . .

Then he and the Kaffir would find sticks for a fire, and they would arrange some stones to form a nest for the sticks. And they would light the sticks, and he would crouch there, blowing to make the sticks burn. He saw himself hunched up before the fire with his puffed-out cheeks. There would be a little smoke, a crackling. The

fire would be burning, and while it burnt, he would fill the kettle from the spruit.

When the coffee was ready they would sit on the kaross, and eat and eat. . . .

In the night they would sleep in those bags people had used in the war, and there would be the karosses too. And he and his father would talk like men. There would be just the two of them—with the native a little way off—just they and the car and the thorn-bushes and the trees and the veld and the stars. Nobody else. Nothing else. Unless, perhaps—his heart beat for a moment with fear as well as excitement—there might be lions about. It was all very well for people to say that lions were timid animals, were shy of human beings. He could not quite believe it. Still, the danger was part of the adventure.

They would have to light a fire for protection. And when he came home he would tell Piet, the herd's son (whose name was not really Piet, but it was simpler to call him Piet), he would tell Piet how the lions had roared, and he was not at all afraid. . . .

Soon they would be right in the bushveld, and now the real shooting would begin. And perhaps his father would even let him shoot too —there was that new shot-gun, it looked so easy to use. And when they came back he would show Piet, the herd's son, a hare or a springbok, and say: "You see this, Piet? I shot it. It was running like anything. And I just lifted up my gun and shot it. You can ask my father. . . ."

No, he could not lie still any longer. He ran into his father's and mother's bedroom. His father was still sleeping, but his mother was awake. She looked at his bare feet, and made a little place next to her. He hadn't done that sort of childish thing for years now, but he was too excited, he had to communicate his rushing eagerness to someone. He crawled in, and lay there shivering and whispering until the daylight came to make the world grey.

Then Elliott began to stir, and presently the Kaffir woman brought in the coffee. And Elliott said: "Well, old fellow, we men are off on our own to-day, what?"

And then they all began to dress, and Mary went to pack the basket, while Elliott saw to the guns.

And they had breakfast, and they jumped on the car, and away they were.

2

Mary stood looking after them, wishing that she had not allowed Jackie to go. She felt heavy at heart as she returned to the house. But presently she took out some shirts she was making for Jackie. She could not afford to waste the time before the new baby came. She must prepare for the period of inaction that was to follow. The baby would be here in three weeks' time.

She worked without ceasing in the days that followed. And on the sixth day after they had left she began hoping for their return. She knew it was too soon. But she thought perhaps —under the circumstances—Elliott might cut off a day from his excursion.

Now she could not settle down to anything. She was too excited, too full of expectation.

But the day passed, and they did not come. And the next day, and the next day. And now it was eight days since they had left, and Elliott had promised her faithfully that they would not stay away more than a week.

Still, she knew Elliott. He was truthful, he was well-meaning, he could be charmingly considerate; but he was not altogether reliable. If he said a week, and he found it hard to return within the week, it would not trouble him very much. That was one of the things she resented in him: he never troubled very much. He would, no doubt, have quite a pleasant reason to give both himself and her why it had to be like that.

Elliott was easy-going, and it was not only his chief attraction, it was also his chief deficiency. That was why he had married Mary ten years ago, assuming vaguely that it would be arranged for him to become a gentleman farmer in Lebanon. That was why they had gone to England at Mary's suggestion, and returned to Africa, again at her suggestion. His amiable acquiescence in things had made it possible for

him to live all those months in her mother's boarding-house, and to accept, at Brand's hands, a position specially made for him.

She accumulated and magnified her grievances against Elliott, and told herself bitterly, as the eighth day rolled itself off the reel of eternity, that there was no reason why she should feel uneasy because Elliott had not strictly fulfilled his promise.

3

Now it was nine days since they had gone. And a fear that, like her child in its early months, had been lying secretly within her, was beginning to stab her with pains. Nine days. Two days late. Perhaps they had had trouble with the car, and there they were, abandoned in mid-veld.

She had pointed out to Elliott a hundred times that the Ford was old and unreliable. He had bought it second-hand two years ago for ninety pounds, and it had all kinds of peculiar tricks. Sometimes it would not start. Sometimes it would not reverse. Sometimes the

brake would not hold. Although she put a brave face on the matter, and brightly called it, in speaking to the people of Lebanon, "our Rolls Royce," or, quite affectionately, "our little Rolls," she hated the car. She hated its senile noises, its dingy appearance, its square and upright smallness—more than anything, she hated the jokes everyone made about Fords.

Brand had two cars. For the mountainous country around Lebanon where his business lay he had a high-powered American car which could travel almost anywhere without change of gear; and for Emma's use in Lebanon he had a beautifully fitted English car which would outlive two or three American cars. . . . Not that that was necessarily an advantage. He liked the solidity of his English car, but he wondered sometimes if the farmers he spoke to were not right when they said that the English machinery was too good. It would not wear out. Year after year the expensive English farm implements would maintain their handsomeness and character, and because they were expensive and because they were good one could not abandon them. In the meantime, improvements were

continually being made, and the farmer who had bought the cheap American article could cheerfully scrap the out-of-date for the up-to-date; but the farmer with the decent English thing could not lightly make changes. And, although he maintained bravely that he would rather have one solid English machine than half a dozen inferior American machines, the truth was that, in his heart, he yearned for the little improvements, indeed, merely for the innovations, as passionately as any woman might yearn for the newest thing in dresses. . . .

But, of course, there was cheapness and cheapness; and when, once, Mary had heard Brand discussing the matter with Elliott in connection with their own farm machinery—he had, at the time, casually compared his English and American cars—she had thought to herself: "Yes. It is all very well to talk of the cheapness one can give up. But what of the cheapness one can't give up?" And her mind had turned from Brand's long, low, handsome car to their square, bedraggled little Ford with its greyish-blackness, and its worn American-cloth seats

that showed the cotton backing under the imitation leather surface; and she had wished that they had rather owned no car at all. It would have been less humiliating, she felt; there would have been no basis of comparison.

But Elliott was quite satisfied with their little old Ford.

"Of course, van Aardt has a better car," he agreed cheerfully. "Why shouldn't he have a better car—half a dozen better cars? Isn't he the boss?"

If Elliott had spent years thinking of an infuriating remark he might make to Mary he couldn't have hit on anything better than that word "boss." Mary had looked at him—at his fair, well-cut face which seemed to her now so noticeably the face of a man who is destined to serve and not to be served—in speechless whiteness. Yes. That was so. Brand was the boss. He might have been her husband, but he was her husband's boss.

She wondered sometimes how Elliott, who was, really, better born than she, could have an appetite so much weaker than hers for the embellishments of life. . . .

And now, because the best that was available to them was this old derelict of a car, she had to suffer, she had to sit here imagining the misfortunes for which that car might be responsible. Poor Jackie might be having to walk for days because she had, for a husband, a failure who could afford no better conveyance. If they had had a car like Brand's, such things would not have happened.

4

She could not sleep that night. She did not try. After all, she remembered, there was the Kaffir. If anything had gone wrong with the car they would have sent him for assistance. They need not have been delayed for such a reason. Probably it was not the car at all. Perhaps it was only that Elliott was enjoying himself, and was not concerned with her anxiety. Would she ever forgive him if he came home cheerfully admitting that the shooting was so good he hated to run away from it?

Yet she knew, even while she nursed her anger against such an event, that she was wrong-

ing Elliott. He might be light and complaisant, but he loved her, he would not let her suffer anxiety. It was true he had left her to go shooting, but she herself had encouraged him, year after year, to go and not worry about her—and now, though he didn't understand, and couldn't understand, he would not deliberately neglect her. . . .

No, her heart cried. Let there be no delusions. There was some other reason—some awful reason—why Elliott and Jackie were not home yet.

5

When she got up in the morning she decided that she could no longer maintain this agonized inaction. She must send someone after them.

Whom could she send? Who would go travelling a hundred and fifty miles on her behalf—no, three hundred, counting also the return journey—because her husband was a couple of days overdue on a shooting trip? Whom, excepting her mother (and she did not want her mother now—she wanted someone in whose

consolations she could believe) whom could she even ask to come and help her through her anxiety?

She felt suddenly terribly alone, as if, indeed, she had always been, and must ever be, terribly alone. No one understood her, the peculiar quality of her being. She would have been a better woman, she felt, if only someone had understood her.

She knew what people said about her in Lebanon: that she was—ugly word! a snob. If they could only realize how essentially different she was to them all, how much better she thought herself than the best of them, they would appreciate how little true need there was for this social pursuit with which she was charged. It was only that she insisted on their admitting—what they would not admit. Let them but show they wanted her, and she would show how little she wanted them.

Of whom, among all the people in Lebanon, and around Lebanon, should she then go and ask a favour? To whom should she say: "Comfort me! Assist me!"

It was not as if something had actually

happened—when something did actually happen the world, of course, was ready enough with its sympathy. It was that she had to go and say: "I am afraid. I have a feeling. It may be nothing. It may be that I am nervous these days. But, in the meantime, I want you to abandon your other business and go journeying into the wilds to relieve my anxiety."

She swathed herself in desolation. . . .

And yet, she knew past all her rhetorical self-questioning, that there was one person of whom she might make a demand. She might wish him ill, she might feel that it hindered her happiness to live within sight and hearing of his prosperity, and that her own life was robbed of satisfaction because it was built on the foundation of his generosity; but when it was a question of human need, then it was of Brand van Aardt she thought. He belonged to the fabric of her life, he was woven into her being by the years of youth they had shared and the process of the thoughts he had had of her. She might like other people better, she might give herself greater pains to reach them and make herself agreeable to them, but when it came to the deep

things these others were ghosts. She could not appeal to them. She did not want them.

She sent one Kaffir in the direction in which Elliott had gone in his Ford, and another to Lebanon, to Brand.

She did not even speak about her fears to the bijwoner's wife. Mrs. Terblanche was typical of her class, submerged and unintelligent. There was no reason why people—living on a farmer's land and helping him, in return for a small share in the proceeds and the privilege of doing a little private farming—why such people should not have been quite meritorious. But it simply happened that generally they were not. Mrs. Terblanche lived in the house while Elliott was away: a fellow human being, nothing more.

The Kaffir whom Mary had sent after Elliott returned at about five o'clock. He brought no news, only a dirty rag Jackie had worn around his inevitably bruised knee, and which he had dropped at their first picnicking place. It had little hard brown stains of blood on it. She snatched it from the Kaffir as if it were a talisman, and clung, as before, to the gate-post, looking up and down the road.

She had been there all day, and she could hardly stand any longer. She felt heavy and weary, and she had had lately a nervous pain in her left leg which was almost unbearable. But she could not rest quietly in the house.

CHAPTER XIII

I

She had no doubt that Brand would come, and when, over the rise in the distance, she saw the approaching dust of his car, it was as if the thought of him had never been anything but a balm.

The car disappeared into the avenue, and emerged presently close to her, and now she saw that Emma was there as well as Brand.

Brand stopped the car, and they both ran to her. She felt a dream-like incapacity of movement, as if an unreal world were travelling very slowly around her, nearer her, upon her. A mind that seemed foreign to her body attached itself to her senses. She saw them coming quickly towards her, she heard them say, "What is the matter?" She realized that she was answering. And she seemed to wake suddenly as she cried: "Oh God. . . . I know—I know something has happened."

2

They took her with them to the house. She made an involuntary sound as she began to walk.

"What is it, Mary?" Emma asked.

"My leg."

"Is it very painful?"

"Yes."

"You must rest."

"I can't rest."

"But, Mary. . . . It may be nothing. It may be just nothing at all."

"They are nearly three days late."

"Why, the car may have broken down. You know how old the car is."

"No, it can't be that. It isn't the car. It isn't that."

They helped her up the steps of the house. She turned to Brand as they approached the dim living-room.

"Oh, Brand. Can't you and Emma even feel it? I'm so sure—so sure something has happened."

They made her sit down on the couch, and Brand lit the lamp that hung in the middle of

the room over the dining-table. Now they could clearly see Mary's grey and haggard face, and her dilated eyes.

Emma sat down beside her. "You're killing yourself, Mary. You have no right to behave like this. I don't believe you have eaten or rested these last three days. When did you eat last?"

"I have eaten," Mary said vaguely.

"Have something now—with us."

Mary shook her head.

"I couldn't."

"Listen, Mary," said Emma. "We'll do everything that's necessary. Rely on us. Brand will go after them, and bring them back."

Mary looked dumbly at Brand.

"Have you petrol here?" asked Brand.

"Yes."

"Then I'll go to-morrow morning, at daybreak. I have two spare wheels, and the car has just been overhauled. If they are not back the first thing to-morrow morning—but there is no reason why they shouldn't be—I'll go out and bring your husband and son home for you."

He smiled as he spoke. He had a slow smile,

and a slow, reassuring way of speaking. His eyes were very solicitous.

His comforting manner found no reflection in Mary's drawn face. But she answered him in a frightened, humble voice which, in its strangeness, went absolutely to Brand's heart:

"You and Emma are very good to me."

3

A Kaffir girl with a black cloth swathed around her head, came in and set the table, and presently brought in some food. She wore the black dress, white apron, and shoes on which Mary insisted, and waited on them. Although most of the farming people in the district were in a better position than the Glenns, few lived with as much regard for decent appearance. And that was a thing which annoyed their womenfolk. They thought it pretentious of Mary to try to maintain a superior style than they troubled to maintain; and, considering her generally humbler status in the farming world, an insult against themselves, an infringement of the unwritten sumptuary laws.

Mary swallowed what was put before her, but

she did not speak. Her senses were concentrated on the road outside. And before the meal was finished she stood up suddenly, and, her brows twisted with pain, ran outside.

Emma followed her. "No," Mary cried. "No. Please leave me, Emma."

"Then let me give you a wrap. Here, take my coat."

She put it on Mary, and returned to Brand in the living-room.

"What do you think, Brand?"

"I don't know. It depends on the sort of man Glenn is."

"But he couldn't deliberately let Mary suffer like this."

"It may not even enter his head that she *is* suffering."

"He promised to be back within a week. It's the boy Mary is worrying about. She feels she should never have let him go. And I don't think myself she should have."

"Still, what can be wrong?" Brand pondered.

They sat silent for a few minutes. Then Emma said: "I don't know whether it is that Mary has infected me. But I am beginning to

feel frightened too." She looked at Brand with her clear grey eyes. "Is it unreasonable to feel frightened, Brand?"

He thought while the clock ticked.

"No. It isn't unreasonable," he said slowly.

4

The Kaffir girl cleared the table, and carefully put a bunch of half-dead sweet peas, which Mary had not instructed her to throw away, in the centre of the bare table. The stalks stood erect with their remnants of blooms, like little flagposts with ragged pennons.

Emma sat down on the couch with a book, and her eyes absorbed the room. She had seen it often before, but not in a mood so sensitive to impression.

She compared the way it looked now with the way it had looked when she and Brand had come to live here in the early days of their marriage. She compared it even with their important new home in Lebanon. It was a better room than had ever sprung to life from under her own thoughts and fingers.

She remembered how formal, how lacking in

character, it had seemed in her own time. She herself had been dissatisfied with it, and yet she had not known how to improve it.

The chairs, for instance. Most of her chairs had had high backs. They stood about like trees in a forest. She had always felt that there were too many chairs, and yet, since this was both a living- and a dining-room, she did not see how she could manage with fewer. And then the curtains. They had been sent her by a firm in Johannesburg in what they assured her was the latest material, but they hung stiffly and disdainfully detached from everything else.

The cushions she had made herself, and she could remember to this day how inhospitably they had seemed to be rejected by the artificial leather of the couch and chairs. They stood there formal and immaculate. They would not yield themselves.

Because it was so hot here in summer she and Brand had chosen green for the wallpaper and linoleum, but there must have been something wrong with the green. It did not look cool and restful. It looked heavy and dingy.

Yes. She had always disliked the room. She

had kept it almost clinically clean, she had most faithfully filled it with flowers, but she had been thankful to see the last of it. Its very cleanness had begun to annoy her.

When they had moved to Lebanon she had firmly decided to have a pleasanter home this time. She had gone about anxiously studying the way other people lived, and she had bought the sort of things that appealed to her in their houses. Brand had given her a free hand, and all his sympathy, and she had, indeed, achieved something quite pleasant and solid and comfortable. The study, in particular, because it had so beautiful an aspect, and because it was full of books, and perhaps even because Brand threw things about in it, was a successful room. And yet, whatever she did, she could not evoke the charm that Mary, so simply, with so little money created in her home. She had whitewashed walls, as Mary had, as everyone now had; she had furniture made of the beautiful hard woods that grew locally; she had built-in bookshelves and stained floors—and yet there was this difference. It was, Emma felt, like her clothes: she had no enterprise, no courage; she

dared not even *try* to be attractive. The fact was, she told herself ruefully (and it was useless to seek for other explanations), she lacked aesthetic taste.

She had said so once to Brand, and she could still recall his unexpected laugh at her confession: "You dear. It's no wonder I rather like you. Is there another woman in the world who thinks she has no taste?"

His saying that had momentarily appeased her. But presently she had asked: "*You* don't think I have, do you?" and when he had answered: "I don't care if you have or not. It's as pretty of you to admit it as it is for a woman to call herself an old maid before other people do," . . . when he had said that she had had one of those moments of doubting that he was as simple as every woman instinctively feels her husband to be.

He had been as easy about her failure at sales. Once or twice, when they were visiting Johannesburg, Emma had gone to sales. As Brand, on such occasions, was too busy to accompany her, she had herself had to bid for what she wanted.

Suddenly she would realize with a shock that she was, as if in a trance, nodding to the auctioneer long after the price she had decided upon was past. She would return to the hotel with her purchases, depressed and conscience-stricken. She would lie thinking in the night what a fool she had been.

"Brand," she would whisper, "are you asleep?"

He would wake up.

"Why do you let me waste your money like that, Brand?"

"What are you talking about?"

"The stuff I bought at the sale. It's no good, we don't want it, and I paid such a lot for it."

"Nonsense. Certainly we want it. And it's worth the money. And even if it isn't, we can afford to overpay for what we like."

"Do you like it, Brand—really?"

"Of course, I do. . . . Now sleep, Emma." His voice would sink down into the depths of oblivion.

Dear Brand, he never repined.

5

But Mary was not like that. She did not make mistakes in buying. She said so herself. Almost every time Emma and Brand came to visit her, she had something new to show them —something attractive and desirable that she had "picked up" in an unexpected fashion. It might be an old Dutch chair from a bijwoner's cottage, or an old Batavian jar—things which had descended down a declining family; it might be a curious Kaffir pot; it might be that carved cabinet which everyone had seen in the shop at Lebanon and had known to be good, but which was too enormous to place in an ordinary house. Just because no one else wanted it, Mary had been able to buy the carved cabinet at no price at all; and then she had made the bottom half of it into a sideboard, and had had legs put on the top half, and there both pieces stood serenely and independently useful. . . . And Mary said gaily to visitors: "Of course, it was a sinful thing to do. But I had to have it. I simply had to have it. And one day I'll put it together again." She would do so, the

implication was, when she had a superior home.

And she always found odd people to make her furniture at a particularly low figure: book-shelves, or that beautifully grained table of syringa wood at which Brand was sitting now, or the couch she herself was resting on, which was so wide and low and comfortable. . . .

Mary used to disclose her trophies to Emma in an exultant voice that all but angered Emma.

"Where do you think I got it? And it was simply thrown away. Just see how *good* it is. I wouldn't sell it for three times what it cost me."

It made Emma feel somehow that, although Brand was a very rich man, and Elliott a very poor man, although the Glenns actually existed by Brand's grace, Mary was the person who had things, and knew how to live, and she herself was an unsuccessful, insignificant, thrust-aside kind of woman. It was no use telling herself that she ought to be glad on poor Mary's behalf that she had this small material satisfaction in the world; that she did not envy Mary her few luckily acquired possessions; that Mary needed greater compensations than this for the general

disappointment her life had proved; that, if one had money, one would always have the opportunity to buy such things oneself: the truth was Mary made her dissatisfied with her own incompetence and lack of enterprise. She used to come home and look round her spacious and costly house, and think: "I don't deserve to have money. I don't know how to use it."

6

And there was some justice in the thought. Emma had not been created for luxury. She would have found a satisfaction in "managing" that she could never get from mere careless possession. Her well-filled house, her laden wardrobes and larders, gave her an unpleasant feeling of repletion.

How differently Mary would have lived if she had been married to Brand. She would have known what to do with his money.

She had a gift for living, Emma thought, and it had been denied her. Even poverty, absolute, uncompromising poverty, an existence so denuded that its bareness could not be disguised, would have suited Mary better than this cease-

less, bitter striving to hide the threadworn patches in her destiny.

The little trophies of her bargain-hunting seemed to Emma suddenly very pathetic. They were all she had to show for her hopes and aspirations. They and Jackie. . . .

Her thoughts swerved round sharply. Jackie! Where was Jackie then at this moment? And where was Elliott? Was it nothing that they were three days late, or was it everything?

She stood up at the thought. "I am going out to Mary, Brand."

"Shall I come too?"

"No, I don't think so. But please give me your coat. Mary has mine."

7

Mary was not at the gate. But, looking down the road Emma saw her, in the moonlight, leaning against a tree.

Emma went towards her. "You shouldn't do that, Mary."

"I wanted to meet them," said Mary.

"But you can't stand about in the road by yourself. It's nine o'clock. Now do come

back. Let me make you comfortable in bed, and Brand and I will stay up and wait for them."

Mary turned towards her quickly.

"Do you think they'll come back to-night? Do you think so, Emma?"

"Why, of course, it's very likely," said Emma.

Mary's eyes moved again to the road.

"No," she said in a voice Emma could hardly hear. "No, you don't believe it."

CHAPTER XIV

I

It was nearly midnight before they at last persuaded her to come into the house. And then she would not undress or go to bed.

"You go," she said to Brand and Emma with stiff, tired lips. "You have the journey to-morrow, Brand."

"But what will you do all night?"

"I'll stay in this room. I couldn't rest in bed."

It was useless to argue with her. "Lie down on the couch then," said Emma. "I'll get you a rug."

She smiled faintly. "Thank you, Emma."

They left her, and she went and sat at the window, looking, as before, down the road. Her mind made a maze of combinations between Jackie, and Elliott, and the coming baby, and Brand, and Emma, and the people of Lebanon, and herself. Something may have happened to

Elliott, and she dared not, accordingly, let herself think evil of him. Yet deeper than her power of control lay the feeling that, even if the worst had happened, it would only be a part of the general disappointment their life together had been.

She did not ask herself what right she had to be dissatisfied with her marriage, what she had done to deserve better of fate. She had long ago accepted it that, because Elliott was not a successful man, he had made of her too a failure, and that this entitled her to be bitter. Yet she cared for him just enough to know that she could not but be involved in a sorrow that concerned him, and it gave her distress a flavour of anger.

For, added to the sympathy with which humanity contemplates suffering, added to the agony of loss by death is a dim, selfish, shameful feeling of resentment against the suffering one, against the dead one. "Why had he to have this pain? Why had he to die? I could have been so happy otherwise."

The moon went down. She could see no

more. Towards morning her head fell forward, and for a few moments she slept.

2

But then she was awake again, and there, in the dawn, leaning against a post of the verandah, and looking at the light in the room that had not yet been put out, she saw Elliott.

Jackie was not with him.

3

Mary ran out to her husband, heavy and dishevelled, her limbs as if they were not her own.

She made a noise in her throat, and could not touch him or speak to him.

Nor did he stir, or say any word.

Then she cried, "Jackie!"

He shook his head slightly.

"Where is he? Where is Jackie?"

He made a vague gesture with his hand.

"Elliott!"

"Lost," he said.

She pushed his body with sudden violence.

"What are you saying? Where is he? Elliott! My God, where is he?"

"Jackie is lost," he said.

In his bed Brand sat up. "I hear voices on the stoep," he told Emma.

"Are they back?" cried Emma. "Oh, thank heaven!"

She had not realized until this moment how frightened she had been.

"I'll get up and make them some coffee," she added, and began to dress in the dim winter light.

Brand left his bed too, put on his overcoat, and went towards the stoep.

He saw the two figures there. "Well," he began in a cheerful voice, and stopped. "Is Jackie all right?" he asked quickly.

They neither of them looked at him. Mary was tugging at Elliott's coat and calling Jackie's name.

Brand came nearer, and Elliott disengaged himself from Mary, and said rapidly to Brand: "Jackie is lost. I couldn't find him. I couldn't find him."

He was dusty to the roots of his hair—more than dusty, dirty. The edges of his nostrils were brown. There was a growth of short, stiff, reddish hairs on his face. He kept touching his cracked lips with his tongue.

Brand stood staring at him for a shocked second. Then he put his arm across Mary's shoulder. It was unyielding and rigid beneath his touch. "Come inside," he said to Elliott.

He led them both towards the kitchen where the Kaffir girl had already lit the fire, and it was warm.

Now Emma came in and stood silently looking at them all.

"When did it happen?" Brand asked.

Elliott's body was swaying.

"Four days ago."

"Four days!" cried Mary. "Four days!"

Emma crossed the kitchen towards Mary. She made a gesture with her eyebrows as she passed her husband. "What?" her lips formed. "Jackie," he whispered back. "Lost."

He thrust Elliott into the only chair. Coming through the window, a ray of sunlight, like a

shining knife, was sharply cutting the shadowed room.

Mary stood clutching the dirty rag the Kaffir had yesterday brought home.

"Why did you come back?" she asked Elliott.

"No, Mary," said Brand. "Be brave. I'll leave the house in half an hour's time. I'll notify the neighbours and the police. A dozen of us will go out and find Jackie for you." He turned towards Elliott. "Tell us how it happened."

Elliott answered him in a quick, mechanical voice.

"I woke in the morning and he was gone. I went about looking for him. There is bush everywhere. I thought he had lost himself in the bush. I fired—to let him—to let him—know where we were. I searched all day and all night and the next day and the next night. And I could not find him."

Brand remembered how he himself had once been lost in the bush. He had been lost for eighteen hours. He had wandered about among the trees—the grey, leafless, winter mimosa—and he had felt he would go mad as the thorns

caught him, and he stooped and crawled beneath them, and the trees stretched away for miles around him, looking as if they had had ash strewn over them, until, in the distance, their greyness became a mist. Overhead it was grey too so that he could not guide himself by the sun. And he had stood and shouted in a terrible despair. When, at last, he had found the stream beside which the camp was pitched he did not know which way to follow it. It was only a chance that he had, after all, taken the right direction. . . .

And it was four days since Jackie had disappeared!

"Not a trace?" he said to Elliott.

"Nothing. Nothing. I thought," they could barely follow his slurred and tumbling words—he was speaking like a man in delirium —"I thought some passing Kaffirs may have found him and taken him with them. He may have been gone for hours when I woke up. There are always Kaffirs wandering about."

His bloodshot eyes looked heavily at Mary, and then away again.

Mary whispered: "Were you near water?"

"Our camp was beside a stream."

"Then——"

"No. Too shallow," he muttered.

4

The Kaffir girl had made the coffee now. She did not look in the early morning as she looked later in the day. She slept on the dung-smeared floor of a mud and reed hut among relations who never washed, and covered herself right over her head with old dirty skins and blankets. Now she was barefooted, wore an old dusty red cloth over her peppercorned scalp, and a big blanket-like shawl round her body. She gave off the heavy smell which is characteristic, not of Kaffirs, but of dirt.

Emma signed to her to go, took some cups from their hooks on the dresser, found saucers, spoons, and sugar, and poured out the coffee.

She put it on the table between Elliott and Mary.

Mary did not touch hers. Elliott took a sip, looked vaguely round, and suddenly fainted.

5

But Mary did not go near her husband. She spoke in a rasping, peremptory voice to Brand.

"We'll go at once," she said.

"Not you, Mary."

"Yes."

The bones stood out in her face, her eyes had a hard steadiness.

"It's impossible, Mary. I can't take you."

She did not trouble to answer him, and he saw talking was in vain. However she was, whatever might happen, she would not be left behind.

Emma was splashing cold water into Elliott's face, and when Elliott opened his eyes, she told Brand to bring some brandy.

"We are going back, Elliott," said Mary.

"No, no," said Elliott, as he struggled to sit upright in his chair.

They all looked at him.

"Don't let her," he begged.

"You will come too," went on Mary.

"Oh, God, it's useless."

Her dilated eyes regarded him with a bitter, silent contempt. How she hated him this moment, Emma thought. She had no feeling for him that she could oppose to her love for her child. She stood there in the crumpled dress she had not removed all night, with her hair in untidy black strands (there were white hairs among the black, Emma noticed), with her hollow, brown-stained cheeks and her pale dry lips, with her heavily veined hands—she stood there big and ugly and utterly careless of herself, and a terrible strength maintained her being. Emma remembered how only last night —only eight or ten hours ago—she had thought of Mary as a woman who lived for the sake of what others might think, and she wondered if, crushed under the weight of suffering like this, such a passion could die for ever. Jackie was lost. If Jackie were not found, would Mary spend the rest of her existence as his bereaved mother, or would the new Mary and the old Mary merge? They would, Emma believed. There was no sorrow, she had discovered, so strong that it killed personality. One was oneself, and there was the end of it.

She gave Elliott his coffee again.

Mary's attitude towards him, she could see, went deeper even than the deep fear which was corroding her soul. She blamed him for what she considered the futility of her life. And that was not just, Emma considered. Mary had married Elliott in a reaction against her circumstances. Because, with his lean, fine-cut face, he looked distinguished in evening dress; because he had come in contact with such people as she herself had never met; because he had a way of speaking and behaving outside her familiar experience—to impress the inhabitants of Lebanon—she had married him. And he still had his lean face and his accent and his manner; but he had to support her now, and not merely open a door for her; he was her husband, and not just, agreeably, an attentive bachelor. She had loved him—or she had persuaded herself she loved him—not for what he was, but for what he might convey. The peculiar circumstances of war had carried them through the first few years; but the experience of every day had revealed him as a simple fellow who, behind his outward seeming, was

an undeveloped and easily led man. Mary, struggling to emerge from a stifled existence—however shabby her efforts might seem—had more in her than Elliott. And she knew it—for she was intelligent enough—and despised him.

It was like her achievements in furnishing a home. They made life pretty, but they did not make life. When she was ill, Elliott stayed away from his work, and carried her tea to her bed, and made her the hot buttered toast on which he prided himself, and arranged her pillows and brought her books. He was always doing little things about the house for her—staining the floor, or hanging up curtains, or putting in nails, or watering the plants—but he had to depend for his hope of maintaining his wife and family on another man's generosity.

And yet, since he gave her everything he had, since he did truly do his best, Mary should not, Emma thought, so utterly reject him in her spirit. If Brand had come home like this, broken and bewildered, would she, Emma, have said to him: "Why did you come back?"—as if he had no right ever to come back, as if he were a criminal?

Oh yes, but would Brand, on the other hand, have returned without Jackie? She could understand Mary, after all.

"You'll have to come with us, Glenn," said Brand, "if only to show us the way."

"You won't find him," Elliott said, and tears of hopeless exhaustion began to roll down his dirty cheeks.

But Mary went away, as if she were an automaton, to make her little preparations.

"Come and lie down on the couch for a few minutes before we go," Emma suggested to Elliott.

She walked with him towards the living room. He fell on the couch, and into sleep.

6

Emma joined Brand in their room while he dressed.

"This is a terrible business," he said.

"Have you no hope?"

"Very little. I've told you how I was once lost myself. That was fifteen years ago, but I'll never forget it. You've heard people speak of

bush-madness. I must have been near it within eighteen hours. And a boy of ten—four days! I doubt if he can be alive."

"But the Kaffirs Elliott spoke of. Can't it be that——"

Brand shrugged his shoulders.

"Still if they did come across him," Emma urged, "they would take him with them. What else could they do? He wouldn't be able to explain where he came from."

"How long was Glenn searching for him, did he say?"

"All day and all night and the next day and the next night," Emma repeated, as if each word were separately recorded on her brain. "And, during that time," she added, "while he didn't find Jackie, somebody else may have done so."

"Kaffirs?" mused Brand. "Kaffirs?"

"If he had been in the bush for hours, he must have been—as you said people became in the bush—and not in a condition to tell them anything. He may be with them now."

She looked at Brand for reinforcement of hope.

"We'll scour the country," said Brand. "Alive—or not—he must be somewhere."

Alive—or not! And Elliott sitting collapsed on the kitchen chair, speaking in that rapid, desperate monotone.

"Oh, Brand," Emma cried suddenly in a low voice. "How could he have left him!"

Brand put his hand on her arm.

"Don't, Emmie. Be calm. We need you."

"Yes, I know. But how could he give up like that?"

"Perhaps he dared not stay away from Mary any longer. . . ."

He picked up his overcoat again. "Well, I must go and see to the car. What is Glenn doing now?"

"Sleeping."

"He looks pretty well done. Mary is like a piece of iron."

"She ought not to go," said Emma. "But, since she is going, I must come too, I suppose. How long shall we be away?"

Brand shrugged his shoulders.

"Who can tell?"

"We must take clothing then," said Emma.

"And pillows and rugs and food. I'll get those things while you fix the car."

Brand kissed her.

"You never fail, Emmie," he said.

7

Mary was waiting on the stoep for the car to start. She spoke not a word to anyone. She had washed her face, and brushed her hair, and put on her hat and coat. And she sat rigidly on a bench as if, indeed, she were a piece of iron.

Emma went to wake Elliott. He sat up and looked at her with dazed eyes.

"We are ready, Mr. Glenn," she said.

He responded galvanically to her words. He clutched her hand with his hard, dirty fingers.

"Mrs. van Aardt. Mrs. van Aardt. For God's sake, don't make me come."

"You must come," she said gently. "You know you must."

"I can't bear any more. Mrs. van Aardt, I'm done for."

How did he mean "done for"? Physically

or spiritually? His cheeks were sunken in, and his eyes were wild.

"I can't go back to that place," he said. "I can't go with you. I can't."

There was a footstep in the passage outside. They looked up. Mary was standing in the doorway like a Fate.

He rose from his couch as if she had dragged him up. For a moment he stood there swaying. Then he followed her to the car.

CHAPTER XV

I

BRAND wrapped a kaross around Emma and Mary where they sat in the back of the car. Elliott shared the front seat with him.

How strange it was, thought Emma, that it should be to Mary who had planned her life so artificially, that this primitive catastrophe should happen. Whenever she looked back upon Mary's life in Lebanon it was always to see her in some situation which would have been ludicrous if it had not, on account of its very ludicrousness, been pathetic as well: Mary trying, with half-truths, to create an impression. Mary debating whether she had been snubbed or not by someone. Mary making casual and accidental enquiries about some party to which she had not been invited. Mary bracing herself to go and call on some newcomer in Lebanon who would return the call, and then adopt the general attitude towards her. . . .

But why was it the general attitude towards

her to push her outside things? Was it on account of that poor little vulgar man, her father, or her downright simple mother? Was it because she herself was boastful and affected? Was it, as her mother always said, because other women and girls were jealous of her? Or was it that, considering all these things, people resented her aggressive personality?

There was something about Mary—so Emma's friends told her—that annoyed them. They could not define it. They said vaguely that she put on airs; but they did not mean that she put on airs since she thought herself better than they were. They meant that, not being as good as they were, she put on airs to cover the gap between them.

That was the atmosphere which surrounded Mary—a persistent suggestion of striving. And not merely of striving—that might have been forgiven—but of angry striving. She did not insinuate, she demanded. Her manner asserted that she had rights; and the world is a world which loves conceding favours, but hates, from the bottom of its heart, if not on the surface of its words, to admit rights. It is as though a

donation suddenly assumed the character of a payment, and the graciousness of giving became the mere discharge of a duty.

Mary urged herself along with a nervous defiance towards what she considered to be her place; and before she had her foothold, she began to dig herself in. The reckless anxiety of the process would dislodge her. She would slip back from her hardly-won niche. The ground she had so painfully made would be lost again.

Emma wondered what, in comparison with the raw and savage suffering she was this moment enduring, Mary would think of the mean sorrows of her social frustrations. She would despise them. She would marvel that anyone could believe they had any meaning. She might even deny them altogether. Yet, because the difference was between a tragedy that could be worn boldly in the eyes of the world, and a shame so petty that it had to be buried deep in her heart, it was the small thing that perhaps did the greater harm. Mary anxiously trying to impress; Mary laughing, with pained, shining eyes, through a discomfiture, was equally with the Mary sitting beside

her on this awful quest, a figure of suffering.

It was, Emma thought, the way she herself could spiritually summon strength to meet the great trials of life, and would yet lie awake at night, regretting a dress that was a failure, or an unsuccessful purchase at a sale. . . . The truth was that humanity was dishonest, even towards itself, in admitting what it was that gave it real pain. It wanted, pathetically and romantically, to be ennobled by its griefs.

2

The sun was climbing the sky, and was peeling from the mountains their black shadows. Now, having wakened to the day, the tops of the distant mountains were enveloping their nakedness in a haze of blue and mauve, but those near by showed dun and brown, and up their sides marched stiff leafless plants like regiments of soldiers. The veld through which the car was travelling was a winter yellow, but there were green trees everywhere, the stumps of great tree-ferns, and aloes with brilliant orange spikes.

The air was still and clear and lovely. What

a day for happiness! And one might not be happy.

They were none of them speaking to one another. Occasionally Emma asked Mary how she felt, to which Mary always answered that she felt well. And sometimes Brand wanted a direction from Elliott, and Elliott would say "yes" or "no," or he would make a gesture to right or left.

Every now and then Emma would wonder with a renewed shock what would happen if, when they got to the bush, they searched for Jackie and did not find him. Brand had sent a Kaffir with a message to the police in Lebanon, and two others with notes to neighbouring farmers—but the nearest of these was twenty miles from the Glenns' place, and it would be some time before they were followed by other searchers. How would they ever get Mary away from the bush if Jackie were not found? And yet, unless, indeed, he had been picked up by passing Kaffirs, he must be found. Even if—she could hardly bring herself to think of it—a lion or a leopard had passed that way . . . they would know. It was not often they came

as far as Elliott's hunting ground. Elliott himself, she was aware, had never encountered one. But, only a few weeks ago, donkeys had been attacked by lions barely sixty miles from Lebanon, and were not their own mountains called the Luipaardsbergen, the Mountains of the Leopards, because they had once sheltered leopards?

Yet, if they did not find Jackie—and Elliott had said they would not, not a trace—how would they ever know what had happened to him, and what would they then do with Mary, and how long would this fury of suffering sustain her?

3

Now they were travelling down the side of a great mountain. They were following the winding road in and out, but they were ever going downwards into the valley.

There was nothing gentle in that valley. The earth had heaved a sigh, and the mountains had broken apart to reveal a world, blasted and beautiful: an uninhabited world, a pre-human, awful, and desolate world. On each side of the

valley the mountains stood guard in their nakedness, and, in front of them, stretching one behind the other past sight, the hills rose in great uneven waves—as if giant hands were rocking the earth beneath. The colours of the waves were the lurid colours of damnation: dying greens, blighted browns and yellows, thunder blues. The clouds threw sinister purple shadows across them. Patches of trees made sudden black spots.

Brand had put the car into second gear now, and was driving very carefully downhill. Presently they were on a small piece of level ground, and he stopped, and turned in his seat.

"How are you, Mary?" he asked. Her lips were the colour of her face—a greyish white. They were apart, as if she could not easily breathe, and very dry. She had not slept for two nights, and barely eaten for several days. She had mechanically combed her hair back from her forehead that morning, but it was straggling away from its fastenings in odd wisps. Brand recalled, with a shock, the round-faced, pretty girl she once had been. It seemed as if it had happened in another world, in another aeon, that he had loved her.

"Quite well, thank you," she said. And then, as if awakened from a trance, she moved restlessly.

"Do you feel cramped?" asked Emma.

"No," she said.

"But we shall stop for a little while after we pass the valley," said Brand, "and then you must eat something."

"I am not hungry," said Mary.

"I know that. But you must have food. You left your coffee this morning. You can't continue this way. If you break down, we shall none of us be able to go on."

"Yes, I will have something," said Mary.

Emma took the flask of brandy from the basket she had packed, and poured some out.

"Take just a mouthful of this now."

Mary swallowed the brandy, and Brand drove on again.

Half an hour later he halted beside a clump of trees, and helped Mary from the car.

She made an involuntary sound as she stepped down.

"Pain, Mary?" asked Emma.

"Yes. My leg. I can't walk."

They spread the kaross on the ground, and Mary sat on it.

Elliott had not moved from the car.

"Are you not coming, Glenn?" Brand called.

Elliott did not answer. He was exhausted past endurance, almost past emotion. He opened his eyes, stared at Brand uncomprehendingly for a second, and closed them again. He was asleep, but for all the peace of oblivion he looked more wretched, in his crumpled, dirty abandonment, than even Mary.

"Poor fellow," said Brand. "Let him sleep." Mary moved her haggard eyes towards her husband, and then away, without saying a word. She ate and drank what they gave her to eat and drink, and returned in silence to the car.

4

For the last hour they had seen no human being as they drove along. But so it was in Africa. One could go in parts like these for miles and never meet one's kind. And if there was nothing in one's self with which to fill the world, this wide emptiness was unbearably desolate. But if one were greatly happy or

unhappy, it was good. For then the waves of one's being might spread into space and never encounter an obstacle to hinder them.

But now they were approaching the edge of the bushveld, and here, on the road, they met, occasionally, little bands of wandering Kaffirs. Then Mary, remembering how Elliott had spoken of Kaffirs who might have found Jackie, would fiercely, but silently, snatch at Brand's arm, so that the car suddenly swerved.

Sometimes the Kaffirs walked barefooted, dressed in ragged, cast-off European garments. Otherwise they were wrapped in bright-coloured blankets. They carried their bundles on their heads, and the babies were slung in blankets on their mothers' backs.

Now and then they met families resting, in the clear sunlight, by the wayside. The woman would be feeding, from her vigorous black breast, the naked, round-faced baby with the short fat legs; or she would be grinding something between two stones; or heaping hot ashes over cakes of dough; or frying small loaves in a tripod pot of boiling fat. The loaves would come out again golden and beautiful to

look at, but hard to eat, except by very hungry people. . . . And perhaps there would be roasted locusts too.

The men would be idling about as befitted capitalists who bought wives and begat children as an investment.

Brand would help Mary from the car, and they would go and speak to the black people. And the women would go on feeding their babies or grinding their snuff or mealies; and the men would go on resting; and the little naked children, with the tight, swollen, shiny bellies, would leave their dancing, and gather about the white people, and look at them from under their protuberant foreheads with a fixed and absorbed attention.

They danced as their forefathers danced. The girls stood chanting and clapping their hands; and the boys formed in line, stamped their feet with all their might, and swayed their bodies from rigid hips. Then there sprang out from the group now one and now another, moving, with sawing arms, with fierce persistent feet, with twitching muscles, before the line.

"Ha! Hé!" they chanted, on a downwards

interval. "Ha! Hé! Ha! Hé! M'do!" and encompassed the octave.

Even the little round-eyed, round-faced, round-bellied three-year-olds joined gravely in the dance. . . .

But when the white people came, they would hurry towards them with one accord, and, clinging together, stand staring at them.

Occasionally they would say something to one another, and suddenly laugh a great free laugh.

The elders, rising politely when they were addressed, would answer the questions that were asked of them.

But they had none of them, they declared, seen or heard anything of Jackie.

"To the man who will bring the child back, or let us know if he hears anything of him, we will give a great reward," said Brand.

"We hear, Lord," they answered. "And if there is something to tell, we will surely come to tell it."

Elliott would continue sitting where he was. He never left the car to make enquiries. He did not even look in the direction of the Kaffirs. He sat shrinking into his clothes.

As Brand helped Mary back into the car, the little Kaffirs would resume their dance.

"Ha! Hé!" they chanted. "Ha! Hé! Ha! Hé! M'do!"

5

And they drove along the bush-covered country that had succeeded the mountains with persistence, with flashes of hope, with terrible imaginings.

Occasionally, in the distance, they saw herds of zebras, antelope, and various kinds of buck.

But, during the many miles when their eyes met nothing except interminable bush, it seemed to Emma as if this motor-car contained all the living things on earth, as if they belonged very tightly to one another, as if this journey were the only reality in the world. Then she felt that even her children, whom she had seen a day ago, came into some other life, that the whole business of existence was to go on and on like this through an empty land.

But she would tell herself again that it was a dream. Such things did not happen, could not happen. What were they all doing here in this

car, she and Brand and Mary and that stranger from England? How did Fate send a man from London to Lebanon to lose a child in the bushveld? What was Elliott to them, or they to Elliott?

And yet he, of all people, had been chosen to be the instrument of their destinies. Through him she and Brand were married, and not Mary and Brand. Through him Mary was spending her life with her back to the wall. Through him Jackie was in the world, and—who knew?—perhaps out of the world too. Through him they were all here. . . .

Now the car was heavily ploughing its way through a drift of red sand—she could see, from where she sat, Brand's knitted intentness as he steered. Beside him Elliott was sitting as if his soul and body were weary of one another.

When they were through the sand Brand stopped the car and looked at his watch.

"What time is it?" Emma asked him.

"Just after three." He turned to Elliott. "How much further have we to go?"

Elliott gazed at Brand with vague eyes.

"To your camp?" said Brand.

Eliott answered in a voice that seemed to come from far away.

"About twenty miles."

"How much further?" cried Mary from the back.

It was the first time she had spoken since they had passed the last group of Kaffirs.

"About twenty miles, he says," Brand told her.

"Twenty miles! Twenty miles!"

"That means an hour," said Emma.

"More, I am afraid," said Brand. "The road is bad."

A moan came from Mary. "Oh, God, what am I to do?"

Her restraint was broken. She turned to Emma in a despair beyond words.

"Not so long now," said Emma.

"Emma—I can't go on—Emma!"

Emma's face paled suddenly.

"Twenty miles!" Mary repeated. "I can't go on."

Elliott looked at her and away.

"Are you sure, Mary?" Emma whispered.

"Yes."

They all understood. The journey and the shock. There were no weeks before Mary now. Hours perhaps. She was Nature's slave, had angered Nature, and was being driven with whips.

"How long is it since we passed any camp?" Emma said to Brand after a silence they had all found it hard to break.

"Over two hours. Perhaps three."

"Shall we go back, Mary?" asked Emma.

"No, no. Not back."

"But, Mary!"

"Leave me here. Go on."

"Across there," said Elliott, pointing to the west, "there is the railway line."

He did not look at Mary as he spoke. His trembling hand had dropped back again. "There used to be a ganger's cottage on the line."

"Are you sure?"

"I think—I remember. Last year."

"How far?"

Elliott shook his head. He could not guide his mind. "I don't know."

"Less far than the last camp?" asked Emma. "Think, Mr. Glenn." She touched his arm softly.

Elliott's face was working in an effort at control.

"I don't know."

Brand looked at him with a sudden distaste.

"Pull yourself together, man. Here, have some brandy."

Ellliott took it, and spoke after a while.

"Not so far," he said. "Not far."

"We passed a cross-road half a mile back, don't you remember?" Emma said. "It went in the direction he pointed to."

"Then we must try it," said Brand. He started the engine again, and turned the car.

Mary was sobbing incoherent, exhausted words. "No, Brand. No, not back."

But Emma held her hand, and spoke to her evenly. "I shall stay with you, Mary. I'll help you through. The men can go on. Brand and I will do all we can. This awful time will pass."

CHAPTER XVI

I

THEY found the branch road and followed it. They had not driven three miles when they saw, lying below them, the railway line, and presently, too, round a bend, the ganger's cottage of which Elliott had spoken. There it stood in the middle of the veld, flanked by a few native huts, and not within fifty miles was there another human habitation.

As they approached a number of mongrel dogs leapt out to bark at them, and some wandering fowls ran fluttering past. A man of about thirty in a pair of dungaree trousers and a faded khaki shirt came out of the house. He was unkempt and unshaven, but he had a decent face.

He stood on his little stoep. Behind him, in a neat row against the white-washed wall of his house, were tins in which grew flowers and ferns. Two other rows of flower-filled tins defined a

path to a low wall of stone which enclosed a little vegetable garden. Some blue-gums, three times the height of the house, stood in a group on the left of it; and, underneath them, on the other side, were the native huts, shaped like hives, and thatched.

Brand stopped the car and got out, and he and the man walked towards one another.

"We are in a very difficult position," said Brand, "and we need your help badly."

"That's all right," said the ganger. "What can I do for you?"

Brand told him about Jackie. The man listened to him in concerned silence.

"The lady behind the driver's seat is Mrs. Glenn, the boy's mother," Brand went on. "She insisted on coming with us although, in her condition, she should not have done so."

The ganger nodded.

"The journey and the worry, you understand, have . . . are you married?"

"No," said the ganger. "I live here by myself."

"No women?"

"Two of the Kaffirs have wives. There is

not another white person between here and the railway station at Koodoosberg. The train passes once a week."

"Mrs. Glenn is very ill," said Brand. "Can you give her a bed? My wife will do what can be done."

The ganger passed his eyes over the passengers on the car.

"The baby, is it?"

"A fortnight too soon."

"Well, you're welcome enough," said the man. "But it's poor accommodation, I don't mind telling you."

"Whatever it is, it will be a godsend. May I bring Mrs. Glenn in?"

"Yes, bring her. I'll try and get the place a bit straight."

He hurried back to his house.

Brand helped Mary from the car. Elliott, with a painful effort, got out too and came towards them. "Let me, Mary——" he muttered.

Mary met his eyes with judgment written in hers. On him, her look said, rested the whole

of her terrible plight; and she would exact punishment.

"Don't come near me till you have found Jackie," were the words she spoke.

Brand made a gesture restraining her, and she turned on him as if he too were to blame. "Go. Go. Leave me alone," she cried.

But Elliott addressed her in a quick, low voice:

"I am staying here. I am not going."

She made an effort for control. Her answer was slow and distinct.

"If you stay, I'll kill myself. You hear that, Elliott? I'll kill myself."

2

They left Emma with Mary, and the two men went on in the car. Elliott himself half sat, half lay, on the back seat in what was either a sleep or a stupor.

At the cottage the lonely ganger did what he could to assist Emma. There were no sheets on the bed, but he had some clean, thin cotton blankets. His two rooms were tidy, but quite comfortless. Except for a crooked deck-chair

on his stoep, he had not a chair which aspired to give any ease, his furniture was made chiefly of packing-cases, and he did his cooking on a small spirit-stove. But there were some magnificent leopard skins on his dung-smeared floor, and he exhibited to Emma with pride his stock of medicines.

"I have to look after myself, you see," he explained. "Though those Kaffirs are not so bad. But what would happen if I got really sick I don't know. I suppose they'd bathe me in dung, or try to burn the evil out of me, or call in a witch-doctor, or something of that sort."

"Does it worry you to think about it?"

"Yes, it does," he admitted frankly. "I sometimes feel I'll go off my head when I wander around by myself in the night and I hear them jabbering in their huts and I remember they're the only human beings near me."

He made a gesture towards the empty veld. His little house was as desolate as a boat on the open sea.

"I used to be a fellow for seeing life," he continued. "But now the only chance I have to meet a white person is when the train passes

here once a week. They stop for a few minutes then. The rest of the time I haven't a soul to say a word to except those Kaffirs or my dogs. It's a life, isn't it, for a young man?"

"Why do you stay?"

"Can't help myself. It was this"—he opened up his arms to indicate his loneliness—"or that"—he pointed to the earth at his feet.

"So bad?" said Emma sympathetically.

"Well, you see, the war. Men trying to squeeze back into their old jobs past their substitutes. Girls there too. Boys grown up in the war wanting to start on their own. You know the sort of thing. There didn't seem a place in the world for me except this." He smiled ironically. "And now when I look around me I sometimes get the funny idea that it *is* the only place in the world."

"And haven't you a chance of being transferred?"

"I've put in for that. They say at headquarters I'll get shifted one of these days. But I'm the only person that seems to be in a hurry about it."

He could not leave off talking. He followed

Emma about telling her things, offering her help, even giving her advice. The situation, so far from embarrassing him, seemed to give him real satisfaction. It was a return to life. He produced tea and biscuits, heated water in a paraffin tin over a fire outside, and went to cut grass to make Emma a bed. He himself was prepared to sleep on the stoep. It was warm enough, he assured Emma, here on the lowveld.

Emma asked him to send her up one of the Kaffir women. "I shall need her during the night."

He agreed to do so, but suggested that he should stay up to act as interpreter, and generally to assist.

And, whenever Emma left the bedroom for the little living-room, there he was, anxious to resume the conversation, tirelessly questioning her, eagerly imparting to her the whole story of his life, from infancy to the war, from the war to this lonely station on the veld.

He was a man as simple and trustful and trustworthy as one of his own dogs.

3

Mary's child was born at midnight, a tiny, undersized thing that exemplified the extraordinary quality of human persistence. It lived. "Look, Mary," Emma whispered, "a little perfect girl."

Mary raised her large eyes, turned her head away, and wept wearily.

At four in the morning she called Emma. "Emma, I heard a car. I am sure I heard a car. They have come back. They have found Jackie."

Emma, who was lying awake on her bed of grass, got up, and took the candle.

"I'll go and see."

She went to the door and opened it. The ganger was lying on the stoep among his plants, breathing heavily, asleep. One of his dogs came towards Emma, sniffing. There was no car, no Brand or Elliott or Jackie, to be seen. She returned to Mary, the candle flickering in her hand.

"No, Mary. They haven't come yet."

"But there was a knocking too."

"One of the dogs must have been shaking himself against the door. Try to sleep, dear. They'll come to-morrow."

She stooped over Mary, made her comfortable. The baby was asleep on a pillow.

"Call me if you want me. I shall be awake."

She lay down again on her pile of grass, and drew about her the ganger's kaross. It was cold now, and she was too tired to rest.

Her mind sprang from one thing to another. From Mary and her baby and the nightmare of its birth, to Brand and Elliott and Jackie. Was it possible—was it at all possible, as Elliott had suggested—that Jackie could have been picked up by Kaffirs, and, lost and bewildered, not understanding them, and not being understood by them, was still in their charge? . . . They would be quite good to him, the Kaffirs. If they had not the white civilization, they had their own civilization, their own standards and virtues. Yes, they would do what they could for the little white boy. If only Jackie were brought back, Emma felt, nothing else would ever seem to matter again.

And why should he not be brought back?

What was there in her that refused the hope?

Another picture formed itself in her mind. She saw Jackie undergoing the experience of which Brand had told her. She had heard stories of men who had lost themselves and been found, raving. And it was five days now since Jackie had disappeared. If she could not pin her faith to that possibility of the Kaffirs, was there any other hope left?

Elliott had said it was useless to search for him any longer. He had searched for two days and two nights, and then he had given himself up to despair. Either, he said one moment, Jackie was with some Kaffirs; or else, he said the next moment, he was so utterly lost that he could never be found.

Elliott himself, thought Emma, must be all but distraught. Only his exhaustion seemed to mitigate the violence of his suffering.

And how cruel Mary was to him. But then her own ill-being was perhaps at the root of that.

Emma tried to imagine how she would have behaved to Brand if Brand had come home and told her what Elliott had had to tell Mary—if

Brand had come home looking as Elliott did, so grey and tired and utterly frightened.

She would have denied her own pain, she thought, to comfort Brand. But then, Mary did not love Elliott, that was the difference. Mary loved success. And Elliott was a failure.

4

Yet it was all very well, thought Emma, as her mind sailed away from her weary body into a world of its own, it was all very well for people to disparage such a craving as Mary's, and to treat with contempt the desire a human being had to stand well with other human beings.

For what, really, was this snobbery one spoke of, this mean and ugly sounding thing, but a primitive development following mother-love and brother-love—the accompaniment of man's progress from family life to group life. Thousands of years ago a man naturally manœuvred to attach himself to whoever could give him the greatest protection and assistance and prestige in the face of the rest of the world; and, repudiating the hampering advances of the weaker

man, tried to give himself dignity and to frighten off his enemies by telling them that he was in So-and-so's group, and under So-and-so's wing. And to-day it was still the same. One tried to bask in the splendour of the respected and formidable, and thrust aside the weak and clinging. And one was ashamed of the impulse without defining to oneself the reason; without realizing that cowardice lay behind snobbery to-day as it lay behind the origins of snobbery in the dim forests of man's beginnings. Poor human creatures, so small and scared and lonely—at the bottom of all hearts were the instincts of fear and snobbery. . . . Mary pretending this thing or that thing about her circumstances, what did it mean but that she was like a disarmed fighter trying to delude opposition by insinuating the presence of reinforcement?

5

Was she awake or asleep, Emma wondered, when, in the striving dawn, she suddenly heard a scream. She ran into Mary's room. Mary was sitting up:

"He's dead. He's dead. He's dead. Emma, he's dead!"

"What is the matter, Mary? What do you mean?"

"The baby."

The baby! Emma looked at the baby. She was sleeping healthily.

But Mary had said "he." Why had she said "he"?

She tried to induce Mary to lie down again.

"Emma," Mary cried. "You don't understand. Oh, God, when was the baby born? What time?"

Emma told her.

"Jackie died then," said Mary.

Emma looked at Mary with fear. Mary, it seemed to her, had lost her reason.

She did not know what to say.

"That was why the baby was born too soon. Because it was time for Jackie's soul to find a body again, and to come back to me. Emma, let me see the baby. Hold her up. Let me see."

Emma held the baby towards Mary. Mary looked at her with straining eyes.

"Take her away," she said. "It isn't true. I had a dream. Don't let me go mad, Emma. Jackie is alive. They will bring him back."

She fell back, exhausted, on her pillow.

6

In the afternoon the ganger called Emma and pointed to a distant object on the veld. "There's another car going in the same direction as yours."

"That must be one of the people to whom my husband sent word," said Emma.

She went inside and told Mary. Mary made no reply. What, indeed, Emma asked herself, was there for her to say? But she suggested to Mary that, now there were other helpers, Brand and Elliott would go further, in the hope of tracking those passing Kaffirs of whom Elliott had spoken.

The day passed, and the next. Towards evening of the third day Emma saw their own car returning. She walked towards it, stopping it at a little distance from the house. Brand and Elliott were alone in the car. Emma had ac-

cepted it that there would be no third occupant, and made no comment.

"How is Mary?" said Brand.

"Better than I expected."

"Is the child dead?" asked Elliott in a muffled voice.

"No. Small but healthy. A girl. The child will be all right, Mr. Glenn."

He made a little motion with his arms, almost as if a physical burden had fallen from him.

They looked at one another in silence. After a moment Emma asked them if they had gone further than the camping place.

"The other car did," said Brand. "Glenn and I stayed on at the camp, looking in the bush. Glenn would not go away."

"Had they come back when you left?"

"We waited for them."

"And——?"

"Nothing."

"Did they meet no Kaffirs even?"

"A few. But none that had any information to give."

"And now we must tell Mary," said Emma. She looked at Elliott. He turned his face away.

Emma made a gesture at Brand. He left the car, and they walked on.

"I am afraid you will have to do it, my poor little Emma," he said. He took her hand. "Have you had any sleep?"

"Not much. But I am not very tired. That ganger has been wonderfully good. He has helped me wherever it was possible. We mustn't forget him, Brand. . . . And you? Are you very tired?"

"Not very." They smiled wanly at one another.

"What will you do now?" said Emma.

"Camp here for the night, and leave early to-morrow morning. I'll send Mrs. Adams back from Lebanon. Then she can stay here in your place."

"There are some things she must bring with her. I'll give you a list."

They walked a little way into the veld without speaking.

Then Emma said: "And this is the end."

"I believe so," said Brand. "But God knows."

CHAPTER XVII

1

THEY were back at the farm, Mary and the baby and Elliott. Something curious had happened to Mary. Now that she knew definitely Jackie had not been found, just, indeed, because he had not been found, she believed he would come back.

She did not cease to send people to search and to make enquiries. She was very thin; her hair was rapidly greying; her eyes had a concentrated stare.

There were those who said Mary Glenn was not—not—altogether normal these days.

2

And she grew more reconciled to Elliott, she developed a strange dependence on him, as if he now had her in his power. Her attitude towards him was a silent supplication to ward off something—some indefinable evil—from her.

All day she considered chances and possibilities with him. "Now tell me, Elliott, you saw him last at the camping-place. What time was that? . . . Yes, I know you've told me before, but it makes things clearer to go over them again exactly. Well, then you both went to sleep. And when you woke up, he was gone. And that was——"

Elliott would rise with a jerky movement very unlike his old slow gracefulness. "Mary, I can't stand this. I've explained everything a thousand times. For God's sake, leave me alone."

Mary would look at him with a conciliatory smile that was frightened too, but she would not leave him alone. She pursued him like a destiny.

Elliott ceased to do his little jobs about the house. He would go away early into the lands and come back late, and it seemed as if he could hardly bring himself to speak to Mary, or even to look at her—it seemed almost as if he hated her.

He said as much one day. She had been asking him, as always, questions about times and

directions and chances, and she had added, as often before, "If you had not come back when you did, Elliott——"

He had wrenched himself up from his chair and told her that he could no longer bear this way of living, that, if she would not help him to find peace at home, he would have to go away and try to find it somewhere else.

She looked at him in that new frightened way she had.

"I didn't mean, Elliott——" she began stammering, and touched him with a propitiating hand.

It was her old habit of pursuing what was withheld from her manifesting itself in a different fashion. Elliott was no longer her slave, he seemed remote, and so she was drawn to him. That, in part. But, still more, it was this fascination he had for her now, as if she were a small, terrified animal watching a possible enemy. And, in practical effect, it was that she had to have someone—she urgently needed it—to whom she might talk about Jackie.

3

As the weeks grew into months she gave up trying to find Jackie. Now she had developed an idea that if she just went quietly about her work at home, he would suddenly, one day, appear.

"I hope they are looking after him well," she said sometimes to Elliott. . . . Who were "they"? She never defined the word. . . . Or she said again: "It is time Jackie had a regular education. When he comes back, we must send him to boarding-school. The Navy, I suppose, is out of the question. . . ." Or, she remarked daily: "Won't he be surprised to find a little sister at home?"

She herself did not seem to be greatly interested in the little sister. She even deliberately restrained her love for her. She had a feeling that she might be cheating Jackie if she spent too much on Sheila. But Elliott gave all there was in him to the little baby, all he had ever given Jackie, and some of what had once been Mary's. It was on account of Sheila that he bore without a more desperate retaliation the reproaches that Mary still, despite all her reso-

lutions and efforts, threw at him. It was on account of Sheila that he actually did not, as he sometimes threatened, leave home.

He became, in these days, a changed man; his pleasant, self-contained manner was gone, and he looked old.

4

As at the ganger's cottage Mary still woke in the night thinking that she heard a knocking at the door. She would spring up from bed and rouse Elliott.

"Elliott, they are back. I hear them."

She would compel him to go with her to the door. But there would be no one there. And Elliott would say wearily: "It's the branches of the old blue-gum beating against the roof." Or, "The horses are kicking at the stable-door. . . . Come back, Mary. You are cold. . . ."

And sometimes he would put a trembling arm around her to lead her back; but other times he would almost run away from her as she stood there looking into the night.

It was when Mary had these immediate disappointments that a reaction would set in, and

she would, for a period, allow hope to be overcome by despair.

5

Lebanon people who had not, in past times, cared very much for Mary, came to see her now. At first they did not quite know how to mention Jackie to her, and they concentrated, instead, on admiration of Sheila. But they found soon that what Mary wanted to talk about was Jackie, that, indeed, she wanted to talk about nothing else.

More eagerly than she had ever, in the old days, described Elliott, his past attainments and future chances, she now described Jackie, his characteristics and habits, and her plans for him.

When the visitors went away, sitting in their cars on the journey back to Lebanon, they agreed with what they had heard. "Poor Mary Glenn!" they said significantly.

And Mary would tell Elliott, when he returned from the lands, who had been to see her that day, and what they had said. She had won through at last, it seemed. Everyone appreciated her now.

CHAPTER XVIII

I

THE day before Jackie's tenth birthday Elliott found Mary making a cake in the kitchen.

"It's Jackie's birthday cake," she explained. "He will be back for his birthday to-morrow."

Elliott had not before heard of this hope of hers. She had treasured it secretly as if it were a private understanding between herself and heaven.

She was awake early next morning—or, rather, she was out of bed early, for she had not slept during the night—walking, with the baby in her arms, up and down in front of the gate where four months ago she had awaited the return of Elliott and Jackie from their shooting trip.

Now it was November and summer time, and the veld was a bright green and full of little flowers. There was a scent of mimosa in the air.

The tall blue-gums were sending out young red shoots, and the red-flowering gums bore huge scarlet clusters. In the orchard on one side of the house the fig trees, the plum trees, and the apricot trees were full of ripening fruit, and grapes were forming on the vines. Only the peaches, because they had not this year had ceaseless attention, were blasted by green-fly. The leaves had curled tighter and tighter until the end of every little branch was a glutinous ball of green-fly in various stages of development, and then the leaves had yellowed and dropped off, so that the trees looked as if they were approaching, not summer, but winter. Now they were covered with a new growth of leaves, but there would be few peaches this year. And peaches, Mary remembered, were Jackie's favourite fruit.

It was a hot day and promised rain. Almost every day, at this season of the year, it rained, and particularly in the afternoon. The morning would open blue and gold with just a few little clouds over the hills. But, suddenly, at about three o'clock, the heavens would become black, there would be a clap of thunder, and in a few

minutes the sky would discharge its heavy cargo of water. It would rain like that for two or three hours, and then, as if at some peremptory command of "That will do for to-day," the downpour would cease, the sky would show bright blue again, and only over the hills there would be left that bed of soft white clouds offering ease to the couching sun. . . .

Mary stood at the gate all morning, returning to the house only when it was time to feed the baby or to put her to sleep.

In the afternoon she was still there, her face very drawn, and Elliott found her so when the first heavy drops of rain began to fall.

"You had better come in, Mary," he told her.

She shook her head. "No, I must wait."

"What difference will it make if you wait here or on the stoep?"

But she was obstinate.

"I saw him last from this very place. I must meet him here too."

That was part of the spell, it seemed to her, that she should be expecting him just here.

"It is beginning to rain hard," Elliott said.

"You will get quite wet. You can't stay here, Mary. Come, Mary. Please come."

"No," she answered with determination. "Leave me, Elliott."

He looked at her for a moment in silence. Then, without warning, he grasped her arm and forced her towards the house and into the living room.

They stood facing one another.

"I can't bear this any more," he said. "This is the end. I thought I would save you, but we are both going mad. Mary, it is useless for you to wait for Jackie. Jackie is dead."

As if from far away he wondered if he were really driving her mad now, or if this were sanity, this expression on her face. The hatred he had felt against her because he had to hold a secret from her and it had burnt into his soul, had left him. It was that same fusion which had generated the power that had maintained him these last few months.

She uttered the word "No" many times, very quickly, and he cut her short.

"I killed him," he said.

He could not see her clearly. His mind was

not consciously instructing him. But the words came. They had matured in the darkness of his brain, and were ripe for birth.

"I left Jackie at the camp, and went off with my gun. I wandered about for a time. Then I saw something moving behind a tree and I fired. I heard a scream, and it was Jackie."

He stood there rigidly, speaking. "He was dead, and I sat with him all that day. I wanted to put an end to myself too, but you were at home waiting, and I had to come back."

Mary had sunk on the floor. Her eyes were dry, but she was sobbing.

"I thought it would be better not to tell you the truth until after the baby was born, and I buried him in the bush, and went on to the camp and acted as if I did not know where Jackie was. I blamed the Kaffir for letting him leave the camp, and we both searched for him next morning. We came home the day after that.

"I found those people here. And I couldn't tell them the truth either. I couldn't say the words. . . . Then you made me go back. I had to go back with you in the car. And I had to leave you in that cottage on the veld, and go

on to the camp and the bush again. . . . We passed—the place. I took van Aardt there because I wanted to see it, and I wanted to let him see it. I tried to tell him then. I tried to tell him on the way back. I couldn't. . . .

"I thought, as we were going towards the ganger's cottage, I would find you dead too, you and the baby. It seemed as if everything had to be dead around me. At the cottage you would not speak to me. And then, when you did speak, it was worse."

He realized, for the first time, that she was lying at his feet. He lifted her up, and she fell on the couch. She did not notice his action or her own; she had not heard his latest words. She was still at the beginning of his confession.

"You killed him," she said. "Jackie," and stared past him with dry black eyes.

"I saw something moving behind a tree," he began again mechanically, and broke off as if another self had interrupted him: "Mary," he cried, "Mary, look at me. Don't sit like that, Mary!"

He was terrified by what he saw in her face. But it was, in truth, returning reason.

"You buried him and came back," she said.

"I'll go away," he answered.

Her face was livid. He rose and brought her some salts. He had passed despair. He was, for the moment, superhuman.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

She motioned the salts away. She was telling herself that she had known from the beginning that Jackie was dead, and that Elliott had a secret which, by every spiritual endeavour, she must guard herself from discovering. She understood that she had deliberately offered up her mind in exchange for the belief that Jackie would return. But the bargain had been refused her. She was still sane.

Now she looked back at the past as if her eyes could penetrate time and distance. She saw the scene in the wood. Jackie, and Elliott beside him. Elliott burying Jackie. Elliott coming back to her. Elliott leaning against the post of the stoep as she had seen him in that dawn four months ago. "Lost," he had said, and had bound the word tight round the secret in his heart.

Her mind sprang back to Jackie in the bush,

so small and her own, and she began to weep with a hot pain that burned away the hope she had nourished, and which she knew now for the traitor it was.

Elliott sat down beside her, and his hand was against her knee. She felt it trembling there, and remembered how, returning to consciousness in the kitchen that morning, he had looked at her, and she had met his pleading eyes with scorn. She had blamed him for leaving Jackie on the veld. And he had, indeed, left Jackie on the veld, but he had not sinned as she believed he had sinned.

She saw him now as the helpless tool of a will stronger than theirs, and thought how he had unfairly, from outside, been dragged into her quarrel with Life.

But what, then, had been her quarrel with Life? She felt suddenly, even while she knew it was a feeling and not a fact, that here, by contrast, she was shown how small before this had been the dissatisfactions that had ruled her.

The fantastic idea came to her that it was with them as if God had determined to test, not the father, but the mother of Isaac when he sent

Abraham into the desert to sacrifice his son. Nor had the sacrifice been interrupted. It had been exacted to the utmost, and this, at last, was her real trial. . . .

She turned her dim, streaming eyes towards her husband, and understood how many men, like seed, were spent that one sorrow might grow to flower. Below even the depths of her own desolation sat Elliott in his cell of remorse.

She saw, for the first time, what had become of her young husband. She knew that she had never loved him as a husband, that she did not love him so now; but she knew also that she pitied him as she could not have pitied any man who was not hers by marriage, and that there was a bond, not only of life, but of death, between them. A serpent of pain was coiled around them and made them one. . . .

She looked at his hand where it lay beside her knee, and all her being revolted from it as she thought of the work it had done. . . .

Then, deliberately, she put her own hand over it and drew it towards her.

THE END

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